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ESSAY

ON THE

NATURAL EQUALITY OF MEN;
ON THE RIGHTS THAT RESULT FROM IT,
AND ON THE DUTIES WHICH IT IMPOSES.

TO WHICH A SILVER MEDAL WAS ADJUDGED BY THE
TEYLERIAN SOCIETY AT HAARLEM, APRIL 1792.

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CORRECTED AND ENLARGED.

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P R E F A C E.

WHOEVER has attentively considered the series of questions proposed for public discussion by the Teylerian Society, will acknowledge that they have usually had the peculiar advantage of uniting curious investigation with general utility. But, of all the questions proposed by this, or by any literary society whatever, none appears either of greater consequence in itself, or from the complexion of the times, more likely to excite attention, than that which is now offered by this respectable body, as the subject of competition for the literary honor which they annually confer. It directly leads to examine the principal foundations of civil society, to unfold the chief obligations of all social duties, to establish the important advantages of subordination, on the one hand, and, on the other, to guard against the dreadful and odious consequences both of despotism and of anarchy. Such are the momentous considerations necessarily connected with the proper discussion of this question; the proposal of which does equal honor to the discernment and public spirit of the worthy directors of the Teylerian institution. Happy may the person account himself, and justly will he be entitled to the thanks of his fellow men, who shall be enabled to treat this subject in any manner adequate to its real consequence and dignity. Far, indeed, is the writer of this Essay from presuming to lay claim to this praise, but he feels his heart impressed by the importance of the subject, and animated with a warm desire of contributing to the public good that portion which his small abilities may

permit. Ever since he was capable of any rational reflection, he has found his soul actuated by the sacred flame of Liberty, by an abhorrence of oppression, and by that love of justice which dictates an equal enjoyment of all the rights of human nature. The grand principle of the natural equality of men, if rightly understood, is the only basis on which universal justice, order, and freedom, can be firmly built, and permanently secured. The view exhibited in this Essay, so far from loosening the bands of society, or weakening that subordination, without which no government can subsist, will draw more closely every social tie, and more strongly confirm the obligations of legal obedience, and the rights of legal authority.

The writer is sufficiently aware that the principles which he attempts to unfold, will not be agreeable either to the wild enthusiasts for liberty, or to the servile and tyrannical abettors of arbitrary power. That moderation, which flows from the love and the perception of truth (which commonly lies between two extremes) is seldom acceptable to the multitude, who, incapable of distinguishing the use from the abuse of things, are generally as extravagant and impetuous in the maintenance of right, as in the abetment of wrong. It is only the few, who have shaken off the shackles of prejudice, dispelled the clouds of passion, and burst from the dungeon in which they confine the soul, that can view and relish objects as they appear in the pure and steady light in which nature exhibits them. The eyes of the rest of mankind are either too weak to sustain its lustre, or, if they have beheld it for some time, become so much dazzled as to lose sight of the objects which it is designed to unfold to them, and are

thus deprived of that direction in conduct which it ought to afford. Of the truth of this assertion, the times in which we live furnish abundant and melancholy examples.

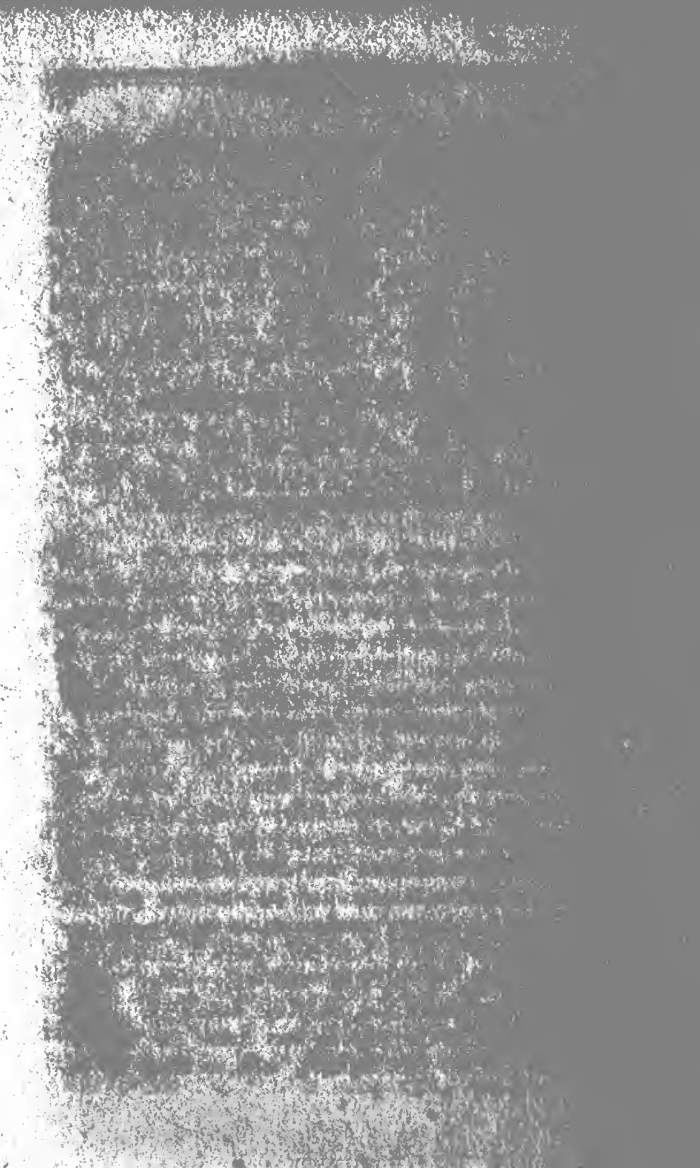
Since the generality of mankind, then, will ever be in extremes, and the wiser few, if they keep themselves free from the contagion of popular prejudice and passion, will, from this very circumstance, seldom acquire any great influence over the general conduct; it may be asked, of what use can such writings be, which the multitude will either not read, or not apply to profit, and the more intelligent do not require? To this question the answer is obvious:—that the progress of truth is sure, though slow; that, if every person of discernment and moderation would consider it as his duty to communicate, as far as his sphere may extend, the light he himself has acquired, a great deal of good might at last be accomplished; and that to contribute any portion, however small, to the common benefit, is both a sufficient motive and a sufficient reward to a benevolent and generous mind. The human soul is formed for truth and virtue. Error, prejudice, and depravity, are unnatural states. Superstition and bigotry, popular frenzy, or despotic oppression, never can be destined by the Supreme Director of the world to hold a perpetual reign, because they counteract his wise and benevolent designs. The passions, and the consequent agitations which they excite, as they are violent, can never be lasting, and, from their very violence itself, tend, by a species of fermentation, to throw off the dregs of ignorance and folly, which obstruct the improvement of our species. These convulsions may be compared to tempests and hurricanes which overcast

the sky with a temporary gloom, and often occasion the most dreadful calamities ; but, in the end, refine the atmosphere, and preserve its salubrity. It is more natural to suppose that the progress of the world is towards improvement and perfection, than, as gloomy but contracted minds are apt to fancy, towards degeneracy and ruin. Even the final destruction of this globe, which Scripture teaches us to expect, will only serve to introduce a more perfect and glorious scene. The times in which we live, though agitated with violent convulsions, and marked by striking events, are peculiarly favorable to rational inquiry and to substantial improvement. On the public affairs of the world, it has often been said, that the speculations of philosophers in their closets have but little influence. But such an opinion can be adopted by those only who are as great strangers to experience as they are to speculation. The conduct of men is commonly directed by their opinions. Their opinions are formed by their principles ; their principles, by the instruction which they receive, by the books which they read, by the company which they frequent. Hence it is easy to see how far the public opinions and conduct must, in a literary age, be affected by the writings that appear in it. If these are dictated by soundness of judgment, and benignity of heart, they cannot fail of producing much benefit.

The time, therefore, and pains employed in speculations, such as are suggested by the important question I now propose to discuss, cannot be mispent, if the subject is treated with any tolerable degree of accuracy and precision. Even those who fail of success may still claim the honor of a laudable attempt ; and from men

of such judgment and candour as characterise those to whom I have the honor of addressing this discourse, are sure of obtaining it. Without detaining the attention of my candid readers any longer from the immediate consideration of the question now before them, I shall directly proceed to examine it. As it stands proposed by the Society, it divides itself into three parts :

- I. In what respects may men be said to be equal ?
- II. What are the rights resulting from this equality ?
- III. What are the duties which it imposes ?



AN
ESSAY, &c.
BOOK I.

In what Sense may all MEN be said to be EQUAL?

CHAPTER I.

Of NATURAL DIVERSITIES among MEN.

THAT all men are, by nature, equal, is an opinion so generally received among those who are accustomed to any degree of philosophical reflection, that to call it in question might appear absurd, and to prove it superfluous. Yet, this opinion, like many general maxims which obtain a currency in the world, however true it may be, in its proper sense, is not, I am inclined to believe, of the greatest part, sufficiently founded according to the acceptance of those who admit it. If it is understood in any sense, exclusive of all natural superiority and distinction among men, it will be found to contradict universal experience. At whatever period of human life, in whatever state or condition of society, we contemplate our species, we shall find that nature has distinguished individuals from each other, by peculiar and appropriate qualities, almost as remarkably, in some instances, as she has distinguished the human race from the inferior creatures. Those philosophers, who, in order to ex-

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alt themselves, attempt to degrade their species, and display their eloquence by defending the most irrational paradoxes, are eager to persuade us, that, as human nature, in its original state, is on a level with the brutes, so individuals among mankind derive every difference of corporeal and mental perfection that characterizes them, wholly from the opportunities of improvement which they have enjoyed, or from the happy situations in which they have been placed. Contradicting universal experience, they strive to refer the judgments which it establishes, to the class of popular prejudices; and, pretending to lead us to the true knowledge of human nature, exhibit to our view a state of brutish ignorance, and of savage ferocity, which has never existed but in their own imaginations. They carry us back to a period of which there are no monuments, and in which they consider man not as a social, but as a solitary animal, actuated by mere animal instincts, destitute of ideas, a mere quadruped grazing along with the brutes, and as little distinguished from the rest of his species by individual qualities, as his species from the other inhabitants of the forest. In order to establish this theory so disgraceful to human nature, they produce certain relations of travellers, concerning Pongos, and Enjokos, and Ourang-Outangs, whom they conclude to be primitive men, whose conduct and mode of life can alone furnish us with just representations of our original condition.* So easy is it, when a favorite opin-

* See Rousseau, sur l'origine et les fondemens de l'inégalité parmi les hommes. Note 10th. This fiction appears to be copied from ancient writers.——See Lucretius, l. v. verse 923. Horace, *serm. lib. 1. Sat. 3*, verse 98. Cicero *pro. Sextio*, c. 42. *De inventione*, lib. 1. c. 2. Lactant. *div. inst.* lib. 6, c. 10. Hobbes *de cive*, c. viii. section 1.

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ion is to be maintained, or a paradox established, to adopt, as principles, judgments destitute of all evidence, and reject principles sanctioned by universal consent. So apt are the enemies of system, to run into systems of their own, whose sole recommendations is singularity, while ingenious sophistry is their only support.

Those writers seem not to have reflected, that if man was originally a brute, he must ever have continued so; and that that instinct, which solely they allow to him in that situation, if it is unerring within its prescribed compass, never can, by any improvement, be carried one step beyond its primitive limits. That capacity of perfection, which they grant to him, as his only distinction above the inferior animals, implies, in its very nature, more elevated and extensive powers, than any of these can possess. To deny this, is to assert, that a building may be erected without a foundation, an elegant and beautiful form exhibited without original materials, an effect produced without a cause. These writers seem to overlook the whole analogy of nature, in which every species is distinguished from every other, by properties common to all of the same class, while all the individuals of each species are characterized by their peculiar qualities. It would be equally absurd to think of forming a man out of a brute, as to imagine that a fish may be transformed into a quadruped.

Those, however, who seek not fame, but wisdom, not brilliancy, but truth, will, in all their inquiries, concerning human nature, take the human species, as they find it exhibited, in its various forms, by daily observation, by the incorrupted records of History,

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and by the authentic relations of travellers. Beyond these sources of information they will not pretend to go in quest of states of human nature, which are only to be found in the pictures of poets, or in the hypothesis of philosophers equally fanciful; and they will consider it as no less ridiculous for any one to philosophise on man with an Ourang-Outang before him, than it would be for a person, attempting to determine the qualities of gold, to reject an undoubted piece of that metal, and begin his experiments with a piece of pinchbeck. For, as a statue, however elegantly finished, still contains the rude mass of marble, on which so much symmetry and beauty has been superinduced; so, man, in the most civilized state of society, still retains the original principles of his nature on which all the various modifications he has undergone, have been ingrafted. It is the business of the philosopher to discover these amidst all the adventitious circumstances with which they may be connected, or the various shapes and colourings which they may have assumed. No human pursuit, no human institution, no human enjoyment, no human corruption itself, but may be ultimately referred to some original principle of our nature; and without these original principles, it is impossible to account for the power of education, of habit, and of example. If, laying aside all regard to imaginary states of human nature, in which none of the principles, which now so powerfully influence our species, are supposed to have unfolded themselves, we fix our attention on mankind as they are exhibited to us in history, and by daily observation, there is one important fact, which must occur to every one endowed with the smallest reflection. This fact, on which I mean chiefly to found my reasonings on the whole

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of this subject, is, that, however similar the species may be in general, an infinite diversity of abilities, talents and character, obtains among the individuals that compose it.

This diversity is evident with regard both to the body, and to the mind. In some, we behold great bodily strength and dexterity, and a peculiar aptitude for mechanical operations, and for rapid and powerful movements. In others, the powers of imagination conspicuously unfold themselves; while judgment, acuteness, penetration and sagacity, in the conduct of life, distinguish another class of men. An uncommon clearness and energy of intellect, and an aptitude for the abstract sciences, raise others above the common level. Some have an astonishing faculty of persuasion, of address, and management in moving the affections, and influencing the conduct of their fellow-men.

Nor is this diversity less remarkable in the moral qualities of men, than in their corporeal and intellectual powers. Some have a wonderful command of their own passions, and can preserve their moderation and composure of soul amidst the greatest provocations, and the most trying calamities; others are deprived of all self-government by the slightest adversity, or by the smallest opposition. Some natures are extremely sympathetic, and easily moved by the distresses of their fellow men; while others discover an astonishing insensibility with regard not only to the afflictions of other persons, but even to their own. Benevolence, and all the gentle and amiable qualities which accompany it, peculiarly distinguish some characters, while

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fortitude and magnanimity, and all the stern and awful virtues, are the leading features of some elevated spirits. Not to mention the characteristical marks of ambition, avarice, voluptuousness, indolence or vanity, which diversify such a number of individuals, it is certain that the moral complexion of men is as various as their corporeal constitution, or their mental faculties, and perhaps is greatly influenced by both.

Nor can it be alledged, that these distinctions of character are entirely derived from the present state of society, and from different opportunities of cultivation; and by no means referable to any original bent of nature. This conclusion will not be authorised either by the inductions of reason, or by experience. For, in the first place, it is hard to be conceived how any combination of circumstances, or any influence of education and habit, can produce any power or propensity, of which the original seeds have not been dropped into the constitution by the hand of the Creator. All that situation and opportunity can effectuate, is to furnish these inherent powers and propensities, with the means of unfolding themselves, of increasing in vigour, and of acquiring maturity. If they are entirely wanting, they will never be implanted by any effort of human skill, or be brought into action, by any favorable combination of circumstances. If they exist in any degree, however small, opportunity, exercise and cultivation, will advance them to a pitch of strength so greatly above their primitive condition, as will have the appearance of a real creation. If we attend to the fact itself, it must be evident that children and savages, who have received no instruction, shew varieties in character, as well as

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men who have enjoyed all the advantages of polished society, and who move in its different spheres. Although a proneness to imitation is universally predominant in childhood, yet the manner of imitating, and the objects to which it is directed, are infinitely diversified. As soon as the faculties begin to unfold, all the passions and propensities that belong to human nature imperceptibly arise, and, according as the one or the other of these is most prevalent, characteristical features distinguish the infant. The objects that engage the attention of the savage, and the desires that animate his pursuits, are indeed few, in comparison of those that exist in more polished states of society. Yet, as these concentrate his whole soul, so they excite its energies the more powerfully within their limited compass, and conspire the more speedily to form his character. In the savage state, the genuine impulses and propensities of nature are freely allowed to appear, and, collected in one point, exert themselves with the greater vigour, and give to each individual that peculiar complexion which results from the peculiar strength of his native powers.* The multiplicity of objects which attract attention, and stimulate activity in more polished periods of society, prevent a character from being so speedily formed: while the uniform institutions of civilized life, mould all the members of the community to mutual resemblance, and contribute to efface those prominent and characteristical features, which the hand of nature has impressed. I mean not to assert that those diversities of talents and character are wholly to be ascribed to

* See Robertson's History of America, and Raynal's Histoire Philosophique et Politique peñim.

the unassisted powers of nature, but only that they prevail in the joint proportion of these powers, and of the circumstances that call them into exercise. As the fire will soon be extinguished, if not constantly fed by combustibles, and as these combustibles, however multiplied, will not produce flame, and light, and heat, unless they are kindled; so the human faculties, if never called into action by corresponding situations, will remain torpid and inefficacious; and the most favorable concurrence of circumstances will not produce genius, dexterity, sagacity, and virtue, if the original seeds of all these qualities are totally wanting. Be this as it may, it is incontrovertible that there is, among the various individuals that compose the human species, an almost infinite diversity of abilities, temper, and character.

From this circumstance a natural *inequality* must necessarily arise. Those talents and dispositions, which are the most amiable and respectable, directly point out their possessors as the objects of love and esteem. Wherever such qualities appear, it is as impossible for the human mind, unless it be most deplorably depraved, to withhold its admiration and affection, as it would be for any natural cause not to produce its effect when placed in circumstances adapted to its operation. Every display of genius, of sagacity, of penetration, and prudence, is calculated to excite the admiration of the beholders, to afford them pleasure, and if beneficently directed, to demand their gratitude. Fortitude, magnanimity and generosity, command veneration, and excite esteem. Gentleness, moderation, kindness, and compassion, appearing as the distinguishing features in any character, cannot fail to attract the love and complacency of all to

whom they are known. Even corporeal strength and dexterity procure a certain degree of respect to their possessors, on account of their utility in life both to others and to themselves.

It is equally certain, that respect, esteem, veneration and love, ensure to those who are the objects of them, a very high degree of influence over the rest of mankind. Such will be listened to, imitated, and obeyed by all who are capable of estimating the qualities above mentioned according to their real merit; the lustre which they shed around their possessors dazzles those whose souls are less discerning and elevated; and even the stupid and the base are constrained to pay an involuntary homage. That such qualities are the only original sources of power and influence, is evident from the conduct of all who aspire at acquiring consideration and authority. If they want the reality, they affect the appearance of them, and, even when power alone reduces their fellow men under their subjection, they endeavor also, if not stupified by the habits of tyranny, to engage their esteem, and to captivate their benevolence, sensible that dominion, to which these give no support, can never be sure and lasting. I am far from asserting that all power and distinction are founded on this natural basis. Lamentable experience proves the contrary. But, that respectable and amiable qualities are the primitive sources of authority and pre-eminence; and, when freely allowed to exert themselves, cannot fail to obtain them, will be as generally acknowledged as it is certain in fact.*

* Hence it is easy to account for monarchies having been almost

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Nature herself, then, has evidently established unambiguous distinctions among men, and produced a very remarkable *inequality* among the individuals of our species. We may freely assert, that if any mortal conspicuously excelled the rest of mankind in every possible talent and quality, whether corporeal, intellectual, or moral, which distinguishes the species in general, and had every possible opportunity of displaying this perfection in all its lustre, he would be raised, by nature herself, as much above the rest of his fellow men as they are above the inferior animals, and be as clearly designed to lead and govern them. Or, if all the above mentioned qualities were the peculiar attributes of any given number of men, these would be marked out by Divine Providence, as a glorious aristocracy or senate, to preside over the community to which they belonged.

every where the primitive form of government. As no society could subsist without some directing power, and as rude and savage men were incapable of extending their views to those more complicated systems which observation and experience alone can suggest and establish, it was natural for them to pitch on the simplest form, which was dictated rather by sentiment, than by reason, and to yield that voluntary obedience to a chief, which their admiration of his superior qualities inspired. This simple form lasted as long as the chief continued to display these virtues, and to apply them in such a manner as to conciliate general benevolence. But, as soon as oppression rendered him an object of hatred, or weakness, an object of contempt, the evils experienced pointed out the necessity of securing the public welfare on a firmer basis than the capricious pleasure of an individual; and the habits of society suggested more complicated systems of government, better adapted to the grand objects of political union. Among boys at school, one distinguished by his courage, his sagacity, or his art, commonly assumes the lead, and governs the juvenile community, with a sway as despotic as that of any eastern monarch. The case is nearly the same in all voluntary associations.

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For they would be possessed of every qualification to discern, of every disposition to pursue, and, from the willing homage and obedience of the rest of mankind, of every power to secure, the public good. Or, lastly, if any human being were invested with such strength and agility of body, with such compass of understanding, and with such complete mastery of his own passions, as fully to provide himself with every thing necessary for his subsistence, or conducive to his convenience and comfort, and as neither to be exposed to the injuries of others, nor to be tempted to injure them, nor to be affected by their misfortunes ; such a mortal would be perfectly independent of the rest of mankind ; and as he needed nothing from them, so he would, in no respect whatever, be their debtor.

But such characters as those above described, have never yet existed in the world, and indeed never can exist. Such an assemblage of perfection is not human but divine.

CHAPTER II.

Of the DISTRIBUTION of HUMAN ABILITIES and TALENTS.

IF we consider the various talents and modes of excellence of which the human species is capable, we shall acknowledge that neither all these, nor any considerable number of them, have ever been found united in any one individual ; nay, that the highest degrees of many of them are incompatible with each other. For, when distinguished honors, or extensive reputation, are acquired by illustrious qualities, we are not thence to infer that the persons, to whom these distinctions are allotted, surpass the rest of mankind in every quality belonging to the species ; but only that they have attained superiority in such, as being more uncommon, are, on that account, more admired. Those mechanical arts and inferior virtues, without which human society could not subsist, attract no admiration, because they are daily exhibited. Yet the most illustrious of mankind stand more in need of the benefits which these afford, than their distinguished abilities can confer on the humble possessors of the former. As those endowed with the qualities most necessary in human life, but of inferior estimation, especially such as are displayed in mechanical labor and art, cannot, from their occupations themselves, aspire at the sublimer and more elegant abilities which distinguish others ; these, on the other hand, must remain destitute of the more useful

ones. That leisure, meditation, and study, without which the faculties of the mind cannot be perfected, necessarily prevent that full exercise of the corporeal members, which ensures their highest vigor and agility. A fancy uncommonly lively and bright is adverse to the patient and accurate researches of philosophy, and to the just application of the intellect, in the discovery and developement of truth, and the improvement of science. That minute attention to calculation, that arithmetical exactness, and that constant observance of the unvarying routine of business, which are necessary to mercantile and economical pursuits, but which present no imagery to the mind, are inauspicious to the more elegant enjoyments of taste, and to the cultivation of the fine arts. The stern and awful virtues seldom associate with the gentle and amiable, and, claiming respect and veneration, seem to disdain complacency and love. Even some corporeal perfections appear repugnant to others. The most robust conformation of the members, and the strength it produces, are not easily united with great agility, and with delicate refinement in the organs of sense. In a word, it appears to be the intention of nature, that, although the human faculties are various, and capable of being carried to amazing heights of excellence; yet this should seldom be accomplished, unless when uncommon culture and improvement are bestowed on some particular faculty, or at least, on a few faculties which have a peculiar native strength.

Variety of talents is, therefore, more applicable to the species than to individuals. The seeds of each (as we have above observed) are, perhaps, cast into every

individual constitution, but the soil is differently adapted to them, and that particular power to which it is favourable, springs up, and, if properly cultivated, comes to maturity, spreads around its branches, and bears abundant fruit. It may be objected, that it seems very preposterous to suppose the creator implanting in any constitution the principles of powers, which were never designed to come to maturity. But, let it be considered that, as the different improvements of men depend on various occurrences, and, as mentioned above, the characteristical qualities of each individual will be in the united degree of their primitive strength, and of the opportunities of culture; it was necessary that the seeds of each should be dropped into every human frame, so that, when favourable circumstances concurred, that power which they were best calculated to improve might spring up and flourish, and thus as much human excellence might, on the whole, be produced as the human condition would admit. This was, moreover, necessary in order to constitute that general similarity which characterises the species, and unites them together in the bonds of a common nature.

Be this as it may, it is undoubted that those who aim at distinction, or even at moderate degrees of excellence in a great variety of objects, generally exhibit a ridiculous figure; after having wasted their time, exhausted their powers, and superinduced on their minds habits of inconstancy and fickleness. Even the greatest geniuses, when they leave that particular track, in which indulgent nature had provided them with unfading laurels, and endeavour to invade the province, and snatch the rewards of others, while they present, on the one hand, the most astonishing instances of the

strength of the human mind, afford, on the other, no less convincing proofs of its weakness and vanity.* Hence the necessity of each individual devoting himself to some favourite and useful pursuit, to which every other should be subservient, and of applying to the diligent discharge of the duties of that department in which he can produce the greatest benefit to mankind, and acquire the greatest honour to himself.

From what has been said in this and the preceding chapter, it appears, in the *first* place, that nature herself has established clear and certain distinctions among men, in the various qualities allotted to each individual, and in the various opportunities furnished them in the course of life for their improvement. These opportunities may occur, though in inferior degrees, in the rudest as well as in the most polished states of society. It is evident, *secondly*, that these distinctions comprehend not the perfection of all the human powers, but the singular excellence of one, or of a few of them, conspicuous in individuals.

* This might be illustrated by many examples of a foolish affectation of universality of genius.

CHAPTER III.

Of the MUTUAL DEPENDENCE *of* MANKIND.

FROM the two facts established in the conclusion of the last chapter, duly considered, it appears to me that the just notion of the natural equality of all mankind, as far as relates to their mutual duties, is to be derived; and that, however paradoxical it may seem, an *equality* the most exact and perfect, in respect of every moral and social obligation, springs from *inequality* itself.

Human nature is evidently endowed with a variety of appetites and desires, adapted to the various objects which are capable of supplying its wants, or of furnishing it with pleasures. The body stands in need of constant support, which is not to be procured without considerable art and labour. This art and labour must be greatly increased, if not only the necessities, but also the conveniencies and elegancies of life are desired, and the refinements of sense considered as objects of pursuit. The senses are not only inlets of pleasures merely corporeal, but of others also of a more refined and delicate kind, of which the mind under the influence of fancy, is the chief percipient. Hence they open a very extensive field of human enjoyment, and claim the whole compass of nature to administer materials for the fine arts. The mind of man is eagerly desirous of knowledge, and wishes to discover the relations, the causes and the effects, of the various objects

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that are presented to it. Not only corporeal wants and appetites, the senses of beauty, of harmony, and of magnificence, and the love of knowledge, subject man to necessities, which must be supplied; or offer to him pleasures which he cannot but desire; he is also actuated by various affections, some selfish and some benevolent, which serve as constant spurs to action, and impel him into various tracks, according to the different complements of their objects.

Such is the nature of man; and from what has been said above, as well as from other considerations on which I shall slightly touch, it is evident, that each individual is insufficient, not only for his own perfection, but even for the supply of his most urgent necessities. The other animals are by nature provided with defence and covering, with subsistence and shelter. They soon attain the full vigour and the complete exercise of their powers, and, without instruction or succour, can apply them with certainty to their respective ends. But man, as he enters into the world naked, defenceless, and unprovided with subsistence, so, without the assistance and co-operation of his species, he must ever remain in the most abject and comfortless condition. The inclemency of the seasons, the sterility of the earth, the ferocity of savage animals, his natural imbecility, oppose to his comfortable existence, so many and so powerful obstacles, as he could never expect of himself to surmount. He is assailed by evils which he cannot repel, subject to wants which he cannot supply, and surrounded by objects which he cannot, by his own strength, convert to his use. Destined for society, he is immediately thrown on its care, and bound by his own weakness, to contribute to its strength. Design-

ed to form the most intimate union with his fellow men, he is constituted miserable and destitute without them ; but, constrained by this circumstance, to join his efforts to theirs, he derives the most astonishing acquired power from his natural imbecility. Furnished with capacities greatly superior to instinct, he at first exercises them in a manner greatly below it ; and, formed for infinite improvement, he proceeds from the smallest beginnings ; but can neither begin nor proceed without the co-operation of his fellow men.

What multiplication of ingenuity, what combination of industry, what concurrence of different abilities, are requisite not only to carry to perfection, but even to invent and exercise, with any tolerable degree of dexterity, those mechanical arts and employments, which exalt the citizen above the savage, which sweeten and embellish social life, which furnish all that variety of convenience and pleasure we daily behold and enjoy, and which, from the most helpless of the animal creation, render man the lord of the world. Will the forest be felled and moulded into furniture, the quarry be dug and polished into materials for building, the marsh drained and converted into arable land, the overflowing river confined to its proper channel, the inferior creatures constrained to succour human weakness by their superior strength, or their spoils be manufactured into clothing ; will the superfluities of one country supply the deficiencies of another, and navigation unite the most distant regions by the mutual and permanent ties of beneficial commerce ; will all this, and much more, which I forbear to enumerate, be accomplished without the united and justly regulated

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efforts of the human species, and the equal application of the talents of each to the common interest ?* Will the secret springs of nature be explored, and the laws, which she observes through all her different provinces, be investigated, unless time and opportunity are furnished to the acute and the ingenious, by means of a commodious subsistence provided for them, by the labour and industry of those whose faculties are less refined and exalted ?

Thus it appears that, as each individual is totally insufficient for his own happiness, so he must depend, in a great measure, on the assistance of others for its attainment ; and that however much any one may contribute to the benefit of his fellow men, by the excellence and splendor of his abilities, whether natural or acquired, he derives from them as much as he can bestow, and frequently much more than he gives.

If the union of all, then, be necessary for the sustenance, the convenience and the happiness of each individual, and each individual can, in his turn, contribute considerably to the common welfare, it follows, as a necessary consequence of this determination of nature, that order and subordination must be introduced, by which the different members of the community may have their proper tasks allotted to them, the talents of each be directed to their proper objects, injustice and violence be restrained, and as great a sum of common felicity be produced, as the condition of humanity will permit. Hence, new channels are cut out for abilities, namely, those which are exercised in

*See Smith's Wealth of Nations, Book 1.

offices of power and authority. As reason, however, loudly dictates the institution of these for the common good of the human race; so she requires that they fall to the lot of those who are qualified to discharge them. When this actually takes place, the order of nature is observed, and all its happy consequences ensue. When this order is overturned, and the different departments of society, but especially those of the highest dignity and use, are committed to such as are incapable of discharging the duties of them, all the dismal effects of folly, injustice, and confusion, are spread through the whole of the social frame, and the evils of that inequality, which the corruption and blindness of mankind have introduced, are severely felt. When the talents and merits of men are allowed their free course, are permitted a fair field for their exercise, and are not deprived of those rewards which are by nature annexed to them, there never can be any ground to complain of inequality among men. For, however unequal their abilities and opportunities may be in themselves, the most perfect equality exists in the distribution of the rewards and advantages annexed to each by the constitution of nature. The good effects of universal industry, and the proper application of the powers of every individual, so as to produce the greatest good upon the whole, are then felt through all the social body. Every person possesses that degree of wealth, of consideration, and of honor, to which he is entitled by his honest industry, or by his services to the public. The active and noble minded exert all their powers for the common welfare, in the most efficacious and illustrious manner. The indolent and selfish are constrained, by the indigence and contempt into which they must otherwise fall, to

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contribute their share to it. But, when power and riches are employed to frustrate virtue of the respect which is its due ; abilities, of the distinction and influence which they justly claim ; and honest industry, of its natural fruits, a most shocking *inequality* takes place, which can only subsist in conjunction with the most odious tyranny. In proportion as this oppression prevails which throws the principal advantages of society into the hands of a few, by no means the most respectable of its members, and renders it a patrimony and inheritance, of which they may dispose at pleasure, society is corrupted and miserable. In proportion as that inequality is maintained, which the Creator has established, and which consists, not in all the members of the social body being placed on a level, but in mutual dependance and parity of obligation among all, amidst a variety of distinctions, conditions, and ranks, society is happy, free, and flourishing, securing to each individual the full enjoyment of all his natural advantages, ensuring to the public the complete product of the efforts of all well directed and justly combined ; uniting all the members of the social body by the ties of mutual interest and benevolence, and preserving as much liberty as is consistent with civil union.

In such a happy state of things, whatever forms of subordination may exist, as there is a mutual dependance among all the parts of the social body ; so there is not the smallest ground for pride and insolence, on the one hand, or for degradation and debasement of sentiment, on the other. Are any exalted above others by the superiority of their mental powers, they are inferior to them in other qualities, which are absolutely necessary to the support and convenience of life. If

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one excels in useful qualities, another is distinguished by agreeable and shining ones; and, as pleasure without utility, is pernicious, so utility, without pleasure, becomes languid and insipid. If one is exalted to power, or illustrious by fame, those who faithfully discharge the duties of an humble and obscure station, enable him to fulfil the duties of his more conspicuous one, and contribute to his exaltation, by occupying those parts of the general system, without which the higher orders could not subsist, and by paying him that deference and respect to which his merit is entitled. If one is eminent by his wisdom and sagacity, by his genius and wit, by his knowledge and erudition; another is no less distinguished by his activity and strength, by his skill and dexterity, by his industry and labour. If one is venerable by his elevation of soul, by his generosity, public spirit, and intrepidity; another is amiable by his gentleness and complaisance, by his patience, modesty, and meekness; and, if the former qualities are the ornaments, the latter are the great sweeteners, of life, while both, operating in conjunction, supply mutual defects, and impart mutual strength and embellishment. If those who fill the higher stations in a becoming manner, confer the greatest benefits on their fellow men, they are equally indebted to them for their support. If the latter stand in need of the judgment and penetration of the former; in order to devise the best plans of prosecuting the public good, and of maintaining the general safety; these, again, stand in need of their resolution and diligence to carry their plans into execution. If some contribute to the instruction and improvement of their fellow men, by teaching and illustrating the grand principles of virtue, on which the

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welfare of society is principally founded, those who enjoy the benefit of their instructions, turn them to their profit, by practising towards them the virtues which they inculcate. If one class of men maintain good order and peace, and another exercise all the elegant and useful arts of social life, there are others who secure these enjoyments and advantages against external invasion, and offer their blood as their contribution to the common interest.

As, in the human body, therefore, the welfare of the whole depends upon that of each individual member, and that again is necessarily affected by whatever affects the whole system; and there is thus a mutual dependance and sympathy among all the parts; so, in society, every individual having a particular portion of talents, and, if properly placed, a particular station, conformable to this, allotted to him, becomes necessary to the welfare of the whole community, and as he affects, is likewise affected by, its prosperity or detriment. All are united by mutual dependance and support: break but one link of the chain, and the rest are of no use, or, at least, are deprived of much advantage and comfort, which is enjoyed when the social series is complete.

Nor ought it to be alledged, that many of those wants, which cannot be supplied but in society, are not the wants of nature, but are merely adventitious, and generated in that society, the necessity of which they are produced to prove. We readily grant, that in refined and highly polished states of civilized life, where luxury has universally diffused its effeminating influence, many

AN ESSAY, &c.

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wants and desires are generated, which are not only not agreeable to nature, but repugnant to human perfection and felicity. Let it however be observed, that this pernicious tendency to human happiness, begins by loosening those ties which knit men most firmly together. It is selfish, not social, enjoyments which are most adverse to human perfection, and man begins to injure his own happiness, by separating it from the general good. It is undoubted, that all the original powers of human nature are carried to the highest perfection in society, and droop and languish in solitude. That state, surely, which is most perfective of every human faculty, is the most *natural*, and it is only by the strangest perversion of terms and ideas that the contrary can be asserted. But the perfection of the social state cannot be attained, without the mutual dependance of mankind, in that extensive sense in which I have exhibited it. That dependance is, therefore, founded in the constitution of nature itself.

CHAPTER IV.

FINAL CAUSES *of the* VARIETY *of* HUMAN TALENTS.

IT is evidently the intention of Divine Providence in bestowing upon different persons different powers and abilities, to point them out for different stations and circumstances, to assign to them different duties and tasks, and thus to promote most effectually the welfare of the human species. By this scheme, it is unquestionable, many more advantages are obtained, with regard to the best interests of mankind, than could have been secured by dispensing the same portion of ability and virtue, that distinguishes our species, on any other plan whatever. For every particular talent is thus cultivated with greater success, when it occupies the constant and habitual attention of its possessor, than it could have been if he had been overloaded with a multiplicity of employments, or distracted by the exercise of various abilities. A greater sum of excellence is thus produced in the species, and of consequence, its perfection and happiness is more effectually promoted. By this plan of distribution, moreover, opportunities are afforded for the exercise of many virtues, which could not have otherwise existed. Thus, were all equally wise and learned, no opportunity could be afforded for displaying either a communicative or a docile disposition. Were all equally rich, or equally powerful, neither generosity nor gratitude could be excited; and, as there could be no demand for succour

and protection, on the one hand, so, on the other, there would be no occasion for condescension and sympathy. Finally, mankind by being rendered absolutely necessary to each other, are constrained to maintain a mutual intercourse of good offices; and society is thus united by the firmest and most lasting bonds.

In fact, this diversity of talents and virtues appears to be the chief circumstance which qualifies men for a social and political existence. Were all endowed with the same definite portion of powers, of whatever kind, to what purpose would men associate, since they would derive little more from their union than they individually possessed? An accumulation of mere strength would be the only effect of combined powers, in the same manner that six horses can draw a greater weight, and to a greater distance, than two. This diversity of abilities, by rendering mankind mutually dependant from their detached weakness, becomes the strongest motive to association, the most powerful bond of society, and its greatest excellence and perfection, when it is properly arranged. Without this, and on the supposition that the same specific qualities were, as in the brutes, allotted to each individual, a more perfect *equality* would indeed be established among all the members of the species; but it would be an *equality* useless for every purpose of association, and would serve rather to separate than to unite them. This circumstance I am inclined to think, has not hitherto been sufficiently considered, at least not in the light in which I have represented it. In this light, those pleas of superior wisdom, or of superior power, which Aristotle,*

* Pol. l. 1mo, c. 2.

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and some late writers, who appear not very favorable to the cause of equal freedom, have urged as the foundations of the dominion of one part of mankind over the rest, are destitute of all force. For, if these pleas should be admitted, even in their utmost extent, they will furnish no ground for independant dominion and superiority, unless it can be proved, at the same time, that the possessors of these qualities are equally endowed with every other which is necessary or conducive to human felicity. Should the wisdom and the strength (as is commonly the case) be found indifferent subjects, it will remain to be decided to which the superiority is to be assigned, and what particular degree of each of these qualities is necessary to constitute a rightful claim. Art and ingenuity may likewise suppose themselves entitled to some portion of dominion, since it is undoubted that their influence is very considerable in the affairs of life. In this manner, every thing is thrown into confusion, and no clear notion of *right* is any where left. But, by the view we have taken of the subject, (which will, I flatter myself, be found to be the true one) every man acquires a clear and definite claim according to the portion he contributes to the general welfare, a most salutary *equality* is still left among mankind, and the community is knit together by ties which cannot be dissolved, without the destruction of general and particular happiness. In a word, the slightest contemplation of human nature convinces us that man is designed by his Creator for society, and as this was his destination, he is so constituted as to be impelled towards it by all his propensities and powers, and linked to it by all his wants and enjoyments, with whatever abilities he may be endowed, or in whatever station he may be placed.

CHAPTER V.

The just Notion of the NATURAL EQUALITY of MEN is placed in EQUALITY of OBLIGATION.—The proper TENDENCY of this DOCTRINE.

FROM what has been already said, it will now sufficiently appear, that the most perfect equality of obligation, of benefits received and returned, subsists among all the members of society, of whatever denomination or degree, who faithfully discharge their duties; that that dependance, which the proud and the powerful are vain to limit to one sphere and station, runs through all alike, and that independence, at which all aspire, is no where to be found among men. For although any human being should be possessed of every imaginable perfection and advantage; yet while he lives in society, and abundantly satisfies all his social propensities, from which the sublimest pleasures of human nature are derived, he receives from mankind such an ample portion of happiness, that he is bound to compensate it by every return, which the utmost exertion of his abilities can enable him to make. From his elevated superiority he is thus obliged to descend to the *equality* of a citizen, and of a man.

In the eye of reason, therefore, and of the Universal Parent, every honest station of life is equally honorable, since they are all but parts of the great social body which his wisdom has planned, and his pow-

er preserves. In this view, no human creature is more or less worthy than another, but in as far as he discharges or neglects the part allotted to him, and augments or diminishes the sum of general felicity ; or as he occupies a place which he is incapable of filling, deprives others of their just station, snatches from them the rewards to which they are entitled, or prevents them from performing the duties of the station in which they are placed, and of the sphere in which they move.

The principles above established are widely different from those which pride and tyranny embrace and inculcate. If men are endowed with superior abilities, or raised to an exalted station, they will not easily admit that, between them and their inferiors, the dependance and the obligation are reciprocal. Unless they are distinguished by peculiar generosity of sentiment they will consider it as no very pleasing doctrine that, between the sovereign and the subject, the magistrate and the people, the great and the mean, the rich and the poor, the acute and the dull, the learned and the ignorant, there is no difference but in the possession of different powers, and in the discharge of different offices peculiar to each capacity, and useful to all ; and that, if the first have a just demand on the second for submission and obedience, for honor and respect, for convenience and ease, the second have as just a claim on them for protection and defence, for the administration of justice, and the preservation of equal liberty, for the supply of their wants and the relief of their distresses, for instruction and good example. Pride and tyranny would place, on the one side, all honor and respect, and nothing but disregard and contempt on

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the other ; here, all oppression and violence, and there, all patience and submission ; here, all convenience and pleasure, and there, all labour and indigence ; here would have the smallest assistance to be considered as an eternal obligation, and there, the greatest services to pass for indispensable duties. With such sentiments, it is no wonder that the mutual dependance and obligation of men should be rejected as a dangerous and odious doctrine, equally subversive of public order, and of private right. Those who think and act in this manner, either making no returns for the benefits they receive from society, or possessing no capacity to make them, are eager to represent every notion of mutual obligation and equality among men, as imaginary and presumptuous, and to oblige the world to look on them as its established lords. But such opinions can never retain their influence, when knowledge has begun to make any progress, and mankind to understand their own nature and dignity. The bodies of men can never be enslaved, when their minds are free ; and the most diligent care of all despots, of whatever rank or denomination, ever has been, and ever must be, to keep mankind in ignorance. As soon as knowledge diffuses her light over the dungeon in which they are enchained, the doors are thrown open, and their chains fall off. In fact, pride and tyranny, by destroying that mutual obligation, and that just equality which we have now established, sap the very pillars which support greatness and display splendor. For, if there is no mutual obligation, no parity of right, then power, on the one hand, and weakness on the other, are the only bonds of social or civil union. It is easy to see where, in such circumstances, the greatest power will be found ; whether in the hands of the poor, the mean, the illiter-

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ate ; or in those of the rich, the great, the learned, and the ingenious. But if the grand principle of *equality* of obligation, and of mutual dependance, is adopted in opinion, as it is established in nature, if stations and offices are neither unjustly usurped, nor their duties perfidiously and weakly performed, the obligation to obedience and submission is as strong on inferiors, as that of justice and disinterested zeal for the public good is on rulers and magistrates ; and the honor obtained by distinguished abilities is equally due to their possessors, as the fruits of their honest labour are due to the lower orders of the community. This principle places the fabric of society on a firm and lasting foundation, and all the parts of the building, however different in point of splendor and ornament, are so closely connected, and so necessary to the whole, that none of them can be removed or defaced, without injuring the beauty or the solidity of the structure. This equally balances all the parts and members of the social body, makes pre-eminence itself emerge from common interest, and again depresses that separate independence which pre-eminence would assume, by referring it to that collective power from which it is wholly derived. A constant balance, and reaction of obligation and duty, is thus maintained through all the departments of society, similar to what we observe in nature. As exhalations and vapours from the ocean and the lower parts of the earth, resting on the tops of mountains, form the springs whence are derived the rivers that water and fertilize the different regions of the globe, and return at last into the ocean, and thus a constant circulation is maintained ; so the more elevated sphere of society derive their political existence and energy from the general mass, and, if properly filled, diffuse through

the whole social body a salutary influence, which again serves to maintain their dignity and splendor. The individuals that occupy these spheres, detached from society, and considered merely as individuals of the human race, are entitled to no distinction or superiority, but what arises from corporeal or mental qualities, which are the distinctions of nature. But viewed in their connection with the political body, they claim their pre-eminence and power, on the same principle by which society is held together, namely, that the general good must limit the pretensions of individuals.

This is that *equality* of mankind, which has been so often asserted, but is seldom well understood—an *equality* which the proud and tyrannical disdain, because it opposes their selfishness or indolence—an *equality* which turbulent and designing men are fain to abuse as an engine for overturning regularity and government, and for introducing that anarchy in the midst of which they themselves are to rise. It is an *equality* which implies subordination—an *equality* of wants, with a diversity of means of supplying them—an *equality* of obligation, with different modes of discharging it. It is an *equality* which, by rendering all equally necessary, makes all, who faithfully discharge their duties, equally honorable in the sight of God; but, by requiring higher and lower stations, and various distinctions and spheres, establishes different degrees of respectability and honor among men. It is an *equality* which degrades none but the tyrant, the ruffian, the thief, the voluptuary, and the fluggard; and exalts all, but these, to the ennobling dignity of constituent members of the grand community of mankind, and of fellow la-

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boursers with God in advancing the felicity of his moral and intellectual creation.

Not less absurd than pernicious, therefore, is that levelling notion, which confounds all distinctions and ranks, annihilates subordination, and destroys that just equality which is founded in nature, and in human happiness. While this frantic opinion is directly contrary to the appointment of God in the establishment of society, and horribly destructive in its consequences, it commonly tends, like every other extravagant and vicious passion, to frustrate its own gratification. Taking *licentiousness* for *liberty*, it becomes the greatest promoter of despotism. For, as nothing has brought religion more into disrepute, than bigotry, fanaticism, and hypocrisy, which have so often assumed that venerable and sacred name; and as nothing has brought so much disgrace on philosophy, both in ancient and modern times, as the profligate lives of pretended philosophers; so *licentiousness*, appearing under the disguise of *liberty*, has a direct tendency to render it either odious or contemptible. The tyrannical oppressors of their fellow men, and their servile abettors, eagerly lay hold of the horrid excesses which licentiousness produces, and at which they secretly rejoice, as infidels delight in the corruptions of religion; paint them with the deepest colours of an inflamed imagination; and ascribe them with triumph to those principles of true liberty, to which they are so repugnant in their origin, and so pernicious in their consequences. The ignorant multitude, incapable of distinguishing appearances from realities, hastily admit both the assertion and its inference, and seek refuge from anarchy in the chains of despotism. The wise, however, and the good, will

equally guard against the wild declamation of the demagogue, and the crafty insinuations of the tyrant will hold fast those eternal principles of equity which God has impressed on their souls, and, if they cannot evince their truth, or inculcate their practice on mankind, will deplore the blindness and the corruption of their species, and pray that the Father of Light may at last unfold a day of knowledge and serenity, when the benignant voice of truth shall neither be stifled by the mandate of tyranny, nor drowned by the acclamations of tumult; when the power of oppression shall be extinguished together with the desire of it; when freedom shall be established on the basis of subordination, and secured by obedience to law; when men shall be attached to justice by the permanent blessings of security and peace.

CHAPTER VI.

Some Circumstances of EQUALITY not yet considered.

HAVING, in the preceding chapters, explained the chief foundation on which it may be asserted that all men are equal, in as far as relates to every social and civil duty, I shall now briefly point out several other respects in which the equality of mankind is farther evident.

I. All men are endowed with the same frame of body, and with the same general constitution of mind. Notwithstanding the diversities which obtain among individuals, in point of higher or lower degrees of excellence in any of the original faculties of our nature, all the species, excepting some uncommon and monstrous instances, is characterised by the same members and organs of body, and by the same faculties, propensities and affections of soul. Does the richest, the most powerful, the most beautiful, the most ingenious among the sons of men, feel less the sense of hunger and thirst, of cold and pain, than those of contrary descriptions; or are these last less distinguished than the former, by the general construction and organs of the human frame? Do not the rich and the poor, the obscure and the elevated, come into the world in the same state of imbecility and wretchedness? Is the infant of opulent parents possessed of greater vigor, or does he require less the assistance of those on whose care he is immediately cast, than the infant of the peasant or the beggar? Can he

already discern and provide his food, use his limbs, defend himself from danger, and, by his hereditary independence, vindicate the true superiority of his condition? So far is any of these from being the case, that, if there is any difference in these respects, between him and the infant of meaner rank, it is all in favor of the latter. This, from the strong and healthy constitution of his parents, brings along with him a frame naturally vigorous and robust, and requiring only the most ordinary care for its nourishment, its preservation, and its final maturity. The other often inherits from those who begat him, a sickly and slender constitution, which the utmost attention and assiduity can hardly preserve from extinction in the moment of birth, and afterwards more frequently debilitate than strengthen.

Again, the same natural principles, propensities and affections, operate on all mankind with different degrees of force, according to their different situations. All men, of whatever rank or condition, are strongly actuated by a principle of self-preservation, by the love of liberty, by the desire of pleasure and an aversion to pain, by the love of society and a dislike of solitude, by the parental, conjugal and filial attachments, by a sense of honor, by resentment of injuries, and by a certain affection for their country. None are destitute of some perception of beauty, order, and magnificence in the works of nature and art, and none, but such as are monstrously corrupted, are insensible to the eternal distinctions of right and wrong, of virtue and vice, of truth and error, in human judgments and actions. Even the most stupid, ignorant and perverse of the human species, differ, in this respect, from the brutes, that as they remember the past, and anticipate the fu-

ture, so they are capable of forming and pursuing some plan of life, of conceiving some system of happiness which they desire to attain, or some image of misery which they endeavor to avoid. No human being therefore, enjoys or suffers like the inferior animals, according to the blind impulses of appetite, or the unanticipated impressions of sense, but has some previous deliberation and choice, with regard to the objects of desire and aversion. Every mortal also feels that, by the birth-right of human nature, he is entitled to certain *rights*, of which he cannot be deprived without ceasing to be a man, or without envying the condition of the inferior creatures. These are the common features of humanity which characterize all the species, and establish among them so many points of equality.

II. All men are equal in being equally exposed to vicissitudes and to death. To attempt any proof of these facts, would be nugatory and ridiculous. But the consequences to be deduced from them, with respect to the light in which the different orders and descriptions of men ought to view each other, are not so evident, or at least possess not that influence over the heart, to which they are in reason entitled. For, if the most exalted of mankind must, as well as the lowest, submit to the stroke of death, and moulder the prey of worms in the grave, if this event equally hangs over his head every moment, and when it happens, must strip him of every external distinction, can any pretensions be more absurd than those of pride, which are solely founded on a pre-eminence so transient and uncertain? For any one, therefore, to value himself on such transitory distinctions, is as ridiculous as it would be for a traveller to imagine himself proprietor of every field through which he passed.

Besides, the stations which discriminate the different orders of society, are by no means permanently attached to any number of individuals that may now enjoy them, or to their descendents. They are subject to many vicissitudes, and have a constant tendency to change. As the parts of material nature are in perpetual fluctuation, and are sometimes altered by secret and silent decays, sometimes by violent convulsions, by tempests, hurricanes, inundations, earthquakes and volcanos, so the various orders of society are exposed to constant changes, partly by sudden and violent agitations, partly by those secret, but certain causes, which are continually operating the exaltation on the depression of men. Foreign wars or domestic commotions, signal calamities or uncommon prosperity, illustrious virtues or flagrant vices, produce the most wonderful alterations in human fortunes. Leaving the public transactions of our own times, which furnish most striking proofs of this fact, what numberless instances crowd into the mind while it revolves the events of ancient or modern history !

Fortuna saevo laeta negotio et
Ludum insolentem ludere pertinax
Transmutat incertos honores,
Nunc mihi nunc alii benigna*.

Hor. Od. l. iii. 29.

* For fortune ever changing dame
Indulges her malicious joy,
And constant plays her haughty game,
Proud of her office to destroy;
To day to me her bounty flows,
And now on others she the bliss bestows.

FRANCIS'S Translation.

There is, besides, in every Nation a certain tendency to change, and the same causes that produced the elevation of the higher orders of men, are imperceptibly operating also in favour of others placed in inferior conditions. As a projectile, when it has reached its highest point of elevation, begins immediately to descend, and continues its course downwards with an accelerated velocity; so there appears to be a certain point of exaltation, beyond which human grandeur cannot proceed, and which, by being the termination of splendor, becomes the beginning of decline, and of final precipitation. On the other hand, as the seed of a tree, from the moment it is dropped into the ground, is continually expanding, and receiving from the earth new additions to its growth, till it mingle its branches with the clouds, and cover the soil with its shade; in like manner, among the lower orders of men, there are evident principles of increase and amelioration of their condition, which fail not to operate successfully when they are favoured by opportunities.

For, what are the vices which are aptest to infect elevated and affluent circumstances; and what the virtues which an humble and hard lot most easily engenders and cherishes? In the former, we often behold pride, which excites indignation and hatred, and, consequently, combinations to repress it. We behold luxury and extravagance, which waste rapidly the most splendid fortunes, and incapacitate for exertion and activity. We behold carelessness and inattention, which allow people's affairs to run into disorder, and occasion irreparable confusion at last. We often behold, extortion, oppression, and flagrant abuse of power, in order to retrieve broken circumstances, which

hasten the ruin they are employed to prevent, and produce indelible disgrace.

In an humble and severe lot, we frequently see humility and modesty, which never fail to conciliate complacency. We see patience and frugality, of which the former renders the hardest condition tolerable, and the latter draws ease from penury. We see industry, and a successful exertion of abilities, which first make men useful and indispensibly necessary even to their superiors; then bring them into notice and regard; and, lastly, raise them to trust and affluence. Thus, while those who are placed in the highest stations, supposing they have no exertions to make, because they have reached the pinnacle of human greatness, are verging towards decline and obscurity, those who move in an inferior sphere, urged by their necessities, or stimulated by their ambition, are making constant efforts to rise, watching every favourable opportunity of success, and silently climbing the steep from which the former are descending. Where are now those illustrious families that occupy such a remarkable place in ancient history? They are not surely all extinct; their descendants, doubtless, exist somewhere upon the earth. But they are confounded with the general mass of mankind, while others have arisen to shine in the sphere from which they have departed. It is thus that Divine Providence, which has, for the wisest reasons, established, an inequality of stations and talents among men, has by allowing their virtues and vices to operate their natural effects of alternate depression and exaltation, restored the balance, which disappears from the view of superficial observers.

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III. If we justly estimate the advantages and inconveniencies of every condition of life, we shall find that they nearly balance each other, that the sum of happiness, shared among the human species, is divided in pretty equitable portions ; and that equality of enjoyment is another ground, on which the different ranks of society, if not the individuals that are placed in them, are on a level. The grand difference, in this respect, consists in what is appropriated to no station or fortune, but is equally open to them all—internal disposition and character ; which it is unquestionable may be displayed in their greatest excellence, and enjoyed in their highest perfection, in the lowest, as well as in the most elevated, sphere. As the different regions of the globe, however removed from the Equator, or the Poles, enjoy equal measures of light and darkness, though distributed in different manners ; so the different orders of society possess equal portions of felicity, and are exposed to equal pains, though the modes of enjoyment and suffering be diversified. If the honors of an exalted station are greater than those of an humble one, its duties are also more difficult ; if its virtues are more splendid, its temptations are more enticing, and its vices more conspicuous ; if its enjoyments are more refined, its sufferings are more acute, and its afflictions more durable. Is it supposed that the burden of labor is heavier than that of indolence, or the pains of indigence greater than those of sensuality ? Consider that health often smiles, on the cheek of poverty, while disease deforms the face of opulence. Do any imagine that the solicitude of providing daily subsistence is greater than that which attends the improvement, or the security, of an extensive estate—that the real wants of nature afford more anxiety and care, than the imagi-

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nary demands of extravagance—that the evils which are really felt, are greater than those which distempered fancy creates?—let such consider the discontent, the uneasiness, the dejection, the wayward humours and the fullen gloom, that so often haunt the great and the wealthy, and acknowledge that sleep visits the couch of straw, and flies from the bed of down.

Do any imagine that it is more difficult to pursue, with constancy and firmness, the rugged and thorny paths of the humble vale of life, than to maintain the elevated posts of dignity and honor, in the midst of intrigue, of competition, of clamour, and of all the uncertainty of favor?—Let them reflect on the solitudes and the terrors of the public governor, when unsuccessful issues attend his administration, when the tide of popular approbation begins to ebb, when his enemies spread discontent through the land, represent him to the people as the author of their calamities, and rouse them to sacrifice him as the victim of their fury. The storm often bursts on the palace, when it passes inoffensively over the cottage!

IV. All men are equal in having some peculiar duty to discharge, some peculiar advantages for the exhibition of corresponding virtues, some peculiar temptations to corresponding vices, and in being placed in a course of probation for a future and final state. If the duties of each station are properly discharged, its virtues proportionably displayed, and its temptations surmounted, it is difficult to say whether the greatest praise is due to the superior or inferior ranks of society. If the duties or the virtues of either are neglected, or its temptations allowed to prevail, the blame is equal

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on both sides, although the punishments are frequently distributed very unequally under human governments. That all men are at present placed in a preparatory state for a future existence, both natural and revealed religion concur in evincing. It is no less evident, from the external principles by which the divine government is administered, that the characters which men have acquired in the present period of being, will be the only measures of their future fate, and that all those distinctions, which are wholly external, will then disappear forever! If any regard is then paid to the different stations which men have occupied here below, it will only be in order to determine how far they have discharged the duties of them, and what degree of merit, or demerit, is to be assigned to each individual, according to the talents he possessed, and the opportunities he enjoyed for the practice of every virtue. Here all men are placed on the most perfect equality, have the same hopes, the same fears, the same pleas to urge, the same titles to produce, or rather are levelled by the same incapacity of all merit but what is derived from the clemency of the Great Judge, operating through the plan of salvation he has established. With his eyes turned to this scene, with any adequate impression of this awful consummation on his heart, (and mad must he be to whose mind such thoughts are never present!) can any one deny the equality of mankind, nor perceive the empty titles, and tinsel splendors, and idle pageants of this transitory period, swimming before his sight, and finally disappearing, like the dreams which occupy his fancy in sleep, but fade and are forgotten when he opens his eyes, and again enjoys the reality of things.

AN
E S S A Y, &c.

B O O K II.

*What are the RIGHTS resulting from the Natural
EQUALITY of MEN.*

C H A P T E R I.

Of the MANNER in which we acquire our NOTION of RIGHTS.

IN the discussion of moral and metaphysical subjects, hardly any thing has occasioned greater obscurity, and, of consequence, more violent disputes, than the ambiguity of terms, and the vague and indeterminate ideas annexed to them by different parties. Of this no word can afford a more striking instance than the term *right*, especially when applied to denote a moral capacity to *act*, to *possess*, or to *demand*, in certain circumstances. Of this the notion will be found to be as various as the philosophical or religious systems which men have adopted, the professions which they have embraced, the stations which they occupy, or the company they frequent. Although people may agree in some general and indefinite notions of *right*, yet, in the peculiar ideas they entertain with regard to its application to all the particular objects of human action and pursuit, it will be found that their conceptions are

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not reducible to any determinate standard. We are not, on this account, however, to imagine that the rights of men are indefinable, or that there are not general classes to which they may be reduced. For, altho' the private rights of individuals must vary according to their different circumstances and relations, there are still certain and permanent principles on which they are founded, and from which they must be deduced, in order to distinguish them from those powers which fraud secretly obtains, or violence openly usurps. Unless this were the case, laws and obligations would be unmeaning words, and power the only arbiters of right and wrong.

Without entering at present into any abstruse and refined speculations concerning the foundation of moral obligation, I shall only observe, that we seem in general to denominate that *right*, which has a tendency to promote the universal happiness of mankind, or that of the individual himself, when it is not repugnant to the more extensive interest, whether of the whole species, or of the smaller communities into which the species is divided. To these two general heads, namely, *tendency to general*, and *tendency to particular happiness*, when properly limited, it will be found that every thing just and honorable, and praiseworthy, in human sentiments and conduct is ultimately referable. Whoever *does*, or *possesses*, or *demand*s, what is conducive to the common good, or to his own interest in consistency with this, that he should *do*, or *possess* or *demand*, we say he has a right to *do*, to *possess*, or to *demand*, it.

It is evident, that the only notions we can form to ourselves of happiness, must be derived from those original principles of our nature, by which certain objects

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are constituted the means of satisfaction and pleasure, and others the causes of uneasiness and pain. The former become, on that account, *desirable*, and the latter *disagreeable* and *odious*. By implanting these desires and aversions in the soul of man, the Creator evidently intended that they should be indulged within the limits he has prescribed to them; and, in order to discover these limits, has superadded the noble faculty of reason. Accordingly, there seems annexed to every natural *desire* and *propensity* of the heart, a certain feeling of a *right* to its indulgence. The original propensities and desires spring up spontaneously in the soul, and impel it to action. In children, these are the first stimulants to motion and activity, and, as they are still undirected by the higher principles of our nature, and by the improvements of experience, constitute their only notions of *right*. As the inferior animals are immediately carried by nature towards those objects which are adapted to satisfy their instinctive principles; so men, in the first period of their existence, greedily desire and seize whatever their appetites or passions point out to them as agreeable, and consider it as an injury to withhold from them the indulgence; but such is the beautiful order established in the human constitution, that many of these propensities limit and balance each other, so that the immoderate indulgence of one prevents that satisfaction of others, which is also a necessary ingredient of happiness. Different pains and inconveniencies, soon experienced from unbridled propensities, suggest the necessity of moderation and self-command. The pleasures and the advantages of society, attach men to their species, and point out, at the same time, the necessity of regulating their conduct in such a manner, as to prevent their desires and pursuits from encroaching on the equally natural desires and pursuits of others.

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Reason, recollecting the past, and anticipating the future, establishes such rules of action and enjoyment, as unite the perfection and happiness of the individual with the general interest of the species, and convert the harmonious movements of the whole social body into the most efficacious means of promoting the happiness of all its members of whatever rank or degree. The moral faculty, surveying such a beautiful and salutary arrangement, sanctions it with its approbation, and decrees that every human being is bound to act and to enjoy in conformity to the principles of this system. The various relations and circumstances of men being considered and defined, general maxims are formed, which are denominated the *laws of nature*. As the human constitution is the work of the supreme Creator, whatever is, by just inference, deducible from this constitution, as a rule of conduct to man, is as justly held to be a divine law, as if the Omnipotent Legislator had proclaimed it with the most audible voice. From these general laws, various *rights* are deduced competent to men, whether as inherent in their common nature, or as belonging to those peculiar relations in which they are placed, by the necessary arrangements of society.

In this manner, the notions of the different *rights* of men are acquired.

CHAPTER II.

The two grand DIVISIONS of RIGHTS which flow from the Natural EQUALITY of MANKIND.

FROM the short deduction contained in the preceding chapter, joined to what has been established in the first book, it is evident that there are certain *natural rights*, which cannot be infringed without overturning the foundations of human society, and that there are others which belong only to certain descriptions of men, in consequence of that social order which is necessary for the general felicity. The former are to be considered as the original conditions of the social compact; the latter as the means by which it is to be executed; and both flow from that idea of equality of obligation, which we have above illustrated.

In the first place, there are certain principles so strongly interwoven with the human frame, so intimately blended with its essence, so efficient of all that can be called human, that the violation of them cannot be regarded in any other light than in that of a degradation, nay, an entire extinction of the distinctive attributes of the human character. Of consequence, every man stipulates, by entering into society with his species, that the enjoyments grounded on these principles, or in other words, the *rights* which attach to them, as the gifts of God to his rational creatures, shall be maintained to him inviolate; and reserves to himself the privilege of defending them at all hazards, whenever it

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is attempted to wrest them from him. For, as every human being is a constituent member of the social body, he is, while he discharges the duties incident to his peculiar capacity, entitled, equally with every other, to the grand prerogatives of human nature, which civil society is intended to maintain and improve. He is as necessary, as the most distinguished of mankind, to the general perfection and felicity, and he contributes to it that portion which his abilities enable him to furnish. The rights, therefore, which are indispensibly necessary to the preservation and happiness of each individual, in whatever rank or situation he may be placed, must equally belong to all, and can never suffer the smallest diminution from any claims or prerogatives attached to the distinctions of fortune, of rank, or of talents. They are the necessary appendages of that equality which subsists among all men amidst the diversities which society and civilization have introduced.

I shall first briefly enumerate and explain the inherent and original *rights* of human nature, which equally belong to all men without exception; and, secondly, those adventitious *rights*, which belong only to particular descriptions of men, as characterized, whether by particular talents, or by particular situations in civil life, but equally to all to whom these descriptions are applicable.

CHAPTER III.

of the ORIGINAL and INHERENT RIGHTS of HUMAN NATURE.

I. **E**VERY innocent member of society has a *perfect right* to life, and to the integrity of his body. No principle is more deeply engraved in the constitution of all animals, than that of self-preservation. Every living creature has an abhorrence of dissolution, and a strong aversion from pain, which is a stimulant still more powerful than the love of pleasure ; because the removal of evil is the first step towards enjoyment. Nothing excites the detestation of mankind more than an unprovoked attempt on life, or even violent assault, when no more is intended than to wound, or to mutilate. Besides, no man can be useful to society, but in as far as his life is preserved and secured, and bodily health and vigour are necessary to discharge the most important social duties. The right to these is sacred and inviolable, and, whenever they are unjustly assaulted, every man is entitled to defend them even by the slaughter of the aggressor, when every other means of security is removed. In this right is evidently included that of the preservation of chastity when attacked.

II. Every man has a *perfect right* to the full fruits of his own honest ingenuity and labour. The Creator, by bestowing on every person a certain portion of corporeal or mental ability, plainly intended that it should be exercised. To this exercise men are impelled by

the stimulants of pleasure, and of pain. Reason, which enables mankind to anticipate futurity, suggests, from the recollection of former wants, the necessity of providing for them when they shall again recur. The natural productions, which may be rendered subservient to the use of man, necessarily become the property of the first occupier, because, if they were appropriated to none, they would be useless to all ; at least, such of them as could afford no present use would remain neglected and unimproved. For no man will bestow labor and time on that from which he is to receive no profit. Men are strongly affected by a tender solicitude for their offspring and near connections, to whom they wish to impart a share of their superfluities during life, and at death, to transmit their entire possessions. They are inflamed with a thirst of honor and applause, and eager to obtain them by the display of useful, of elegant, or of sublime, talents. Besides, while men mutually supply each other with what they want, for an equivalent, society is more closely cemented by a constant interchange of the various products of industry, of art, and of wealth ; and, by the different conditions of men in point of fortune, opportunity is, as above observed, afforded for the exercise of many virtues, which could not otherwise exist. Man's double capacity, as an individual, and as a member of society, is thus best preserved, and his selfish, as well as his social, propensities are gratified. In fact, the same means that enable him most amply to indulge the former, also qualify him for satisfying most effectually the latter. By the exercise and cultivation of all his faculties, and by the improvement of the opportunities he enjoys, he best promotes his own private happiness, and, in the same manner, he contributes most to the public

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good. As the perfection and solidity of all the parts of a building, produce the solidity and perfection of the whole; so, in human society, the prosperity of all its members in their different relations and circumstances, produces the sum of general happiness. Notwithstanding therefore, the Utopian system of a community of goods, which some political projectors, fixing their eyes on partial views of advantage and inconvenience, have endeavored to recommend, and some smaller societies have exemplified, it is undoubted that both public and private happiness require that the right of property should be sacredly maintained.

This *right* implies not only that possessions already lawfully acquired, should remain the inviolable property of their possessors, but also that every honest and fair mean of acquiring should be equally open to all who are placed in the same circumstances. It requires that a fair field be granted for the exercise of every useful and ornamental talent, and that its natural rewards be not withheld from it. Partial and narrow systems of policy, whereby the interest of a few is only consulted, frequently cramp genius, and restrain industry, to the great prejudice of the common good.

These, however, with whatever pretexts they may be coloured, are justly to be accounted violations of the sacred right of property, which regards not only what men already honestly possess, but also, what they may honestly obtain. The powers of their bodies, and the faculties of their minds, are the only property which men receive from nature. The exercise of these on the various natural productions, introduced the *adventitious* rights to these objects, and inheritance and con-

tracts transferred them from their original proprietors to their successors. But the foundation of all property is the common *right* to the earth and its productions, which God has granted to mankind, together with the peculiar appropriation which every one made of some portion of these to himself, by the use of his mental and corporeal powers. It is absurd, therefore, that *adventitious* rights should be sacred, while the *primary* means of acquiring these rights may be wantonly circumscribed.

III. All men have an equal *right* to a fair and honest character, till it has been proved that they have justly forfeited it. The love of character is deeply implanted in the human breast, and as it can only be extinguished with the extinction of integrity; so it is strong in proportion to the strength of virtuous and elevated sentiments. The loss of reputation, wounding one of the most lively feelings of the human heart, is one of the greatest calamities in life. With the loss of character many other evils are unavoidably connected, which, while they destroy the private happiness of the individual, also frustrate his public utility. The success of a person in the world, whether in the improvement of his fortune, or in the exercise of his abilities, depends greatly on the opinion which is entertained of his integrity. His usefulness to society depends chiefly on the confidence which his fellow men can repose in him. When any man's honesty is questioned, his talents, far from being objects of complacency, are converted into sources of terror, and mankind naturally combine in order to deprive them of those opportunities of exertion which seem to threaten their own safety.

Fame, or distinguished consideration and respect, belong only to eminent abilities, virtues or stations. But

the character of honesty belongs equally to all who faithfully discharge every social and civil obligation. Those who, in every situation and circumstance, whether of exaltation or of obscurity, carry along with them purity of heart and integrity of conduct, meet on the equal footing of good men, and are equally entitled to all the enjoyment, advantage and consideration, which that character justly claims, and cannot fail to possess, if not clouded by misrepresentation, or stained by calumny. The most illustrious abilities, or the most exalted station, give not, of themselves, a better title to a fair and spotless character, than the most moderate parts, or the most humble circumstances. This *right*, till it is lost by vicious action, extends to all conditions and ranks without exception.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

IV. **E**VERY man has a *perfect right to liberty*, or to act in whatever manner he pleases, provided he offers no injury to others, and violates no law enacted by the public authority of the civil society to which he belongs. As soon as we form the notion of a rational agent, freedom immediately enters into the conception, and all happiness and all virtue rest on its foundation. For as virtue consists in the proper use of all our faculties, or in that conduct which is suited to the human nature and condition; so happiness consists in the possession of those enjoyments, of which nature has rendered us capable, and which the right use of reason enables us to obtain. But how can he, who is deprived of the power of regulating his own actions, and of determining and directing his pursuits, either exert his faculties in such a manner as is best adapted to their ends, or pursue those enjoyments, with the greatest vigor, to which he has assigned the highest value; how can he, who is subjected to the arbitrary will of another, contribute his portion to the common order and felicity, which results from the combined efforts of all directed to this glorious and comprehensive end—from the combined exertions of knowledge, wisdom, skill, ingenuity, dexterity, art, labour, resolution, and vigour, shared among all the members of the social body? Suppress the just exertion of any of these separate portions, just so much is cut off from the general

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perfection and happiness, and, while individuals are oppressed, the public suffers. Subject them to the arbitrary will of one, or of a few, all the light, and invention, and energy, which result from the free, but well regulated efforts, of all acting in harmonious concert, are gone—all that variety of talent, of design, of pursuit, and of operation, which embellish, and improve, and strengthen, human society, is extinguished—and the whole social mass, subordinated to one feeble and impotent will, ever influenced by narrow and contracted views, or by cloudy passions; either pines in a passive lethargy, or, if it is called into action by extraordinary stimulants, exhausts its strength by its efforts, while their produce is wholly drawn off by the privileged part; similar to those aged trunks on which we behold a few of the higher branches retaining their sap and verdure, while the tree itself is rotten, and sinking speedily to dust. Thus the preservation of liberty is necessary to the attainment of public, as well as of private, felicity; nor can it ever be supposed, that any human being, whose judgment is sound, and who has not been corrupted by long habits of servitude, would either explicitly or tacitly relinquish what is necessary to every enjoyment of human nature, and without which society itself is his greatest curse. In short, liberty and human nature are inseparable; to destroy the former is to annihilate the latter—is to annihilate every notion of duty, and virtue, and happiness, beyond what is merely sensual and brutish.

It is no wonder, then, that the love of freedom should be strong and vigorous in the breast, in proportion to the elevation of sentiment, the sense of honor, the regard for virtue, with which each individual is endowed, and that, by every generous and feeling soul,

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slavery should be deemed the greatest of human evils. Base, indeed, and corrupted, and broken by habits of servile subjection, must that man be, who can consider himself as the property of his fellow creature, and feels no indignation at the tyrant who reduces him to this despicable condition, and who, degrading the rational creation of God, which he has first debased in his own soul, outrages heaven while he domineers upon earth. Few of mankind are so degenerate as to have lost all sense of liberty, and of the native dignity of man. For, although they may submit in silence to a despot, yet they abhor him in their hearts; and, when they can do it with safety, would lay hold of the first opportunity of shaking off the yoke. The names of master and slave, annihilate all claims of duty, all voluntary offerings of affection, and exhibit man to man in a state of hostility, where power is the only right, and terror the only obligation.*

Notwithstanding this aversion to servitude, and this love of freedom, so strongly implanted in the human

* From these considerations it may be established as a certain truth, that arbitrary governments, in whatever hands they may be placed, can never effectually secure the happiness of mankind. With whatever wisdom and goodness a prince may be endowed, it is impossible, from the narrowness of the human mind, that his views can extend to every department of civil society; and he will be unavoidably exposed to imposition from some quarter or other. His administration, of consequence, can never be marked with that extensive beneficence, which results from forms of government which are calculated to collect into one point the wisdom, ingenuity and vigor which are diffused through the whole social body. Besides, as it is the intention of civil society to promote the happiness of all its members, it is impossible that its ends can be obtained, when the sense of freedom, which is so essential an ingredient of human felicity, is either completely extinguished, or deprived of its enjoyments.

breast, it must be confessed, that there is in mankind both an astonishing propensity to tyrannize, and a wonderful facility in submitting to enormous power. The freedom which men claim to themselves, they are not willing to grant to others, and the principle which inspires the wish of independence, produces the exercise of oppression. The love of pre-eminence and power rejects competition and equality; fond attachment to one's own opinions stimulates men to prescribe them as rules to others; possession constantly aims at enlarging its bounds: elevation and authority have a perpetual tendency upwards, and, in their ascent, depress those parts through which they move—the generality of mankind, long accustomed to admire splendour and wealth, or eminent talents, readily submit to their dominion; and voluntary homage often begins the subjection, which is at last exacted as a right. Habits of servitude debilitate the sense of freedom, and the rigours of oppression are frequently necessary to rouse it. It is thus that the love of independence stimulates to encroach on the rights of others, and that such encroachment is so frequently successful.

On this account, all civil liberty is limited by these two conditions, abstinence from injury to others, and submission to the laws enacted by the authority of political society. Whoever injures others is not a free man, but a tyrant, and, if he is free, others are slaves*. As it is the grand design of civil society to secure men from that injustice and violence which would soon subject all to the most powerful, it is necessary that the

* Hence the propriety of the inscription *LIBERTAS* on the prisons of Geneva. See Rousseau—*Contrat Social*—and Howard on Prisons.

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public authority should circumscribe the actions of each individual. While all are equally subject to this authority, and the collective power of the whole community is centered in this point, it follows as a necessary consequence of that equality, which consists in the relation that all equally bear to the social body, that the actions of each should be directed and limited by this relation. No member is subject to another, considered as a member, but every member is subject to the whole in its collective capacity, and, when this capacity is transferred to any part, or to any number of parts of the social body, these deriving their pre-eminence and authority from the whole society, have a right to govern all its members, while in every instance in which they appear as members themselves, and act, not in a public, but in a private, capacity, they are equally subject to the common will, expressed by public laws, with all the other members of the community. In civil society, it is this alone that maintains that equality which subsists among all its different members, notwithstanding the diversities which fortune, rank, or talents, have introduced. For, as these only diversify the manner in which each is to contribute his portion to the public good ; so when all are equally subject to common laws, all are levelled by this common subjection, and every one is restricted to that line of conduct, which is necessary for the preservation and welfare of the political system. Unlimited freedom is unattainable not only in civil society, but in every species of association whatever, because the actions of every individual of the society are limited by the actions of all the rest, and by the general design and conditions of association itself. The grand design of every social union is to obtain the co-operation of all its members for the common good. It is hence incumbent on every one of them, so to regu-

late his conduct, as to contribute to the end proposed. Nay, perfect liberty, if, by that term, we understand the unrestrained indulgence of every desire and propensity, is as inconsistent with the rational constitution of each individual, as it is with the principles of civil union. For there is an order established by nature among all our desires and passions; and reason is given both to discover and to maintain it. As the violator of civil order ceases to be a citizen, and becomes a public enemy, so he who violates the order of the moral and rational nature ceases to be a man, degenerates into a brute, and is the destroyer of his own happiness. As a man, he only is free, who, delivered from the yoke of passion, freely follows the dictates of his nobler faculties, and indulges every natural propensity in consistency with mental order. In like manner, civil society is free, when delivered from arbitrary power, in whatever shape it may exist; all its members are placed under the empire and dominion of laws, enforcing the grand principles of political union, and equally binding on the legislators themselves as on the people. If any are raised above law, or enjoy privileges and prerogatives, which have no relation to the public good, and are burthensome to the community, in proportion as they are advantageous, to the possessors of them, the principles of civil union are opposed, political equality is subverted, and oppression, more or less grievous according to the degree of such inequality, is introduced.

As the limitation of law is inseparable from the liberty to which every citizen has an incontestible right; so this *right* implies that, in every instance, neither contrary to law, nor injurious to others, every innocent person, who has reached the years of maturity, and has not voluntarily subjected his actions to the controul

of others, should enjoy the power of acting as he pleases. Persons of sound judgment, and of generous sentiments, will, in the use of this freedom, consult not only their own pleasure and advantage, but also, the felicity of all to whom their influence may extend. Their pursuits will be characterized by a dignity and beneficence, which will point them out as the ornaments of society, and the objects of general admiration and gratitude. Such will find their most delightful enjoyments in their own highest improvement, and in their most extensive utility to others. Men of inferior capacity, or of a meaner turn of mind, will chiefly devote themselves to sensual pleasures, and to selfish pursuits; and thus withhold from the public a great deal of benefit which they might otherwise contribute. On this account, however, they are not to be deprived of their liberty, as long as they remain within the bounds of that innocence, which, however deficient in a moral and religious light, is sufficient for the maintenance of public peace, and of civil and political order. They are not amenable to human, but to divine justice; and must be called to account, not in the present, but in a future world. Argument, persuasion, and example, may be employed; and every good man will use them to the utmost of his power, in order to diffuse virtue and happiness among his species. But to use violence for this purpose, is both to disappoint the end, and to exhibit an instance of that folly which is reprobated in others. Men may be constrained to be harmless and just, but not to be virtuous and happy!

In the right of liberty is included the free use of private judgment in every thing relative to the regulation of conduct, and especially to religion, as

well as the free communication of sentiment within the bounds above stated. It is vain to think of enjoying liberty of action, if the opinions by which action is to be directed are not also free. In fact, the right of private judgment cannot be alienated or wrested from any human being by any power on earth. The mind of man, constituted free by its Creator, will ever remain so, in spite of every endeavour to enslave it. Ignorance may darken, prejudice restrain, or corruption pervert, its powers; still the opinions which it really embraces, are such, as appear to it the best, according to the light which it enjoys. But to conceive any mortal adopting an opinion, for which he perceives no ground, is the most glaring contradiction — is to suppose him admitting and rejecting at once the same propositions. With regard to religion, in particular, the right of private judgment, and the freedom of conscience, are to be maintained, as necessarily connected with the equality of all men, above established; for, although religion ever has been, and ever must be, the strongest bond of society, yet the strength of this bond depends on the united evidence of the religious opinions which are adopted, and on the sincerity with which they are embraced. It is only when religious opinions are both true in themselves, and ingenuously professed, that they can exert any auspicious influence on the actions of men.

Now, to perceive truth is the operation of the understanding. To embrace it with becoming zeal, and to obey its dictates with undeviating constancy, is the operation of the heart. The understanding may be enlightened by reason, the heart may be affected by persuasion, and, in order that either may be produced

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perfect freedom is necessary. To convince or to persuade by violence, is the greatest of absurdities, is a manifest impossibility; and when there is neither conviction nor persuasion, where can religion subsist? Place it where it can only reside—in the understanding and the heart; it eludes all constraint. Remove it from this habitation, it loses its salutary influence.

As religion, therefore, must, from its very nature, be free, no man can have any right to dictate to the conscience of another. All men are equally entitled to serve God, and all are equally bound to serve him *in spirit and in truth*. No man can serve him with another's spirit; and no man can discern truth with another's understanding. To subject religion to constraint, is, of consequence, to destroy its essence, and to annihilate its salutary tendency. Enthusiasm and bigotry, whose character it is to erect their own opinions as standards for all the world, and to violate the rights of conscience, never fail, if they are successful, to give birth to hypocrisy, as the heir to their usurped dominion. Hence it is easy to account for the small influence which religious opinions have on the conduct of their professors, while pure and undefiled religion ought naturally to produce the most salutary effects, not only in rendering men *wise unto salvation*, but in forming them to the practice of every social and civil virtue. Religion is either believed to be something very different from what it is, to consist merely in forms and ceremonies, in which case it has either no effect at all on moral conduct, or a very pernicious one—or men are constrained to profess what they do not believe; by which their hearts are corrupted, and their actions and sentiments are at constant variance. The

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glory of God is thus promoted by defacing his image on the human soul, and by transforming his *reasonable service* into childish pageantry and insignificant pomp. Besides, if any set of men assume to themselves the power of prescribing to others in religious matters, others may, with as good a title, do the same whenever they obtain the power. True religion may thus be suppressed and destroyed, without its professors having any plea for its defence which is not equally competent to the most absurd superstition. While men thus domineer in religious matters, according as they possess the power, all religious improvement is precluded; the wisest and most pious of men may be obliged to submit, in obsequious silence, to the most ignorant and impious; and superstition, in all its hideous forms, is put on the same footing, and enjoys the same advantages for its maintenance and propagation, with divine revelation itself. This right of freedom of judgment carries along with it that of free communication of sentiment, within the limitations above laid down. As there is in man a strong natural propensity to communicate his feelings and sentiments to others, so the faculty by which he is chiefly enabled to communicate them is one of the most powerful bonds of society, and one of the chief instruments of its improvement. By suppressing this freedom of communication, the natural equality of men is destroyed. Those from whom it is wrested are degraded from the condition of members of the community, and, being stripped of this privilege, may be prevented from contributing that portion to the public good which it might enable them to afford. How much the improvement and felicity of mankind depend on the free diffusion of knowledge, is too evident to require any proof. Nor is it less certain

that ignorance and prejudice, ever delighting in darkness, because their Laponian eyes are too weak to endure the light, are extremely desirous of excluding it from whatever quarter it may shine. They endeavor, therefore, violently to extinguish the lamp of reason, and to silence the voice of truth. If they succeed, all the evils of barbarism are perpetuated ; if the precious right of free communication of opinion is maintained, private as well as public happiness is the result. But, if men embrace and profess opinions with regard to religion, morals, or politics, the most grossly false and erroneous, are such systems to be tolerated, and not rather proscribed as effrontive to God, and pernicious to men ? The first enquiry must be, whether such opinions tend to overturn the principles of civil society, and to disturb its order and peace. If any are so foolish, or so wicked, as to entertain sentiments subversive of those fundamental truths on which the mutual obligations of men, and the practice of all virtue, and civil society itself, are founded ; such may be justly constrained to abstain from the propagation of them, or to remove from the society of which they are members ; or, if they obstinately refuse to comply with a requisition which self-preservation dictates, may be justly punished in order to deter others from imitating their example. But as such fundamental truths are few, and universally acknowledged, so they ought not to be unnecessarily multiplied in order to suppress the exercise of private judgment, or connected with other points in which diversity of opinion, far from being pernicious, conduces to enlarge the bounds of human knowledge, by pouring in new light from various inquiry and intelligence. Besides, as no sincere professor of any system of religion or morals really believes it impious and pernicious,

but, on the contrary, entertains the highest opinion of its excellence, such ought rather to be convinced by argument, than destroyed by persecution, and, while he abstains from actions injurious to others, it is unjust to treat him with severity and violence. It is undeniable that bigotry, and superstition, and enthusiasm, whether religious or civil, have often produced the most direful calamities in the world. But it is to be observed, that this has entirely proceeded from the principle against which I am now contending, namely, the right of any man to dictate to the conscience of another. For if, on the most important of all subjects, men supported their cause by argument and persuasion only, superstition, bigotry and error, would soon be driven from the field, and true religion and pure morality obtain decisive victory in every part of the world. But while different sects and parties mutually represent each other as the enemies of God and man, and connect, with every speculative opinion, the most important consequences to the temporal, as well as the eternal, interests of mankind, rancour, and hatred, and malevolence, soon burst into the flames of the most violent animosity, persecution appears in her most hideous forms, and the cause of God, and the interests of mankind, are assumed as pretexts for indulging the most ferocious passions of the human breast! If, on the one hand, therefore, professions evidently subversive of the fundamental principles of society have no claim to toleration; so, on the other, the greatest caution is to be used not to class, under this head, opinions which have no connection with the interests of civil society, but regard only theological or philosophical speculation. I mean not that erroneous opinions are always free from blame, because it is an undoubted fact that error is not always

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the result of weakness of judgment, but more frequently, still of pride, of obstinacy, or of negligence. But as no man is master of another's conscience, so no man can claim to himself the judgment of this point with regard to another, but in as far as opinion is manifested by action. *To his own master he standeth or falleth, what art thou that judgest another?*

The right of liberty, which I have illustrated at considerable length, because it is not generally understood, includes, first, personal liberty; secondly, liberty of action; thirdly, liberty of conscience; fourthly, liberty of communication of sentiment.

To all these modifications of liberty within the limitations above stated, every member of society has an equal *right*; nor can any discrimination of rank, of fortune, or of abilities, entitle any one to any privilege in these respects, which is not equally due to every human being who is possessed of a sound mind, has reached the years of maturity, and has not voluntarily subjected himself to the controul of another.

CHAPTER V.

*That it is the INTEREST of GOVERNMENTS to preserve INVIO-
LATE the RIGHT of LIBERTY, as above explained.*

IT is a false notion to suppose that governments are most firmly established when the liberty of the subject, or of the citizen, is destroyed. It will, in fact, be found, on mature consideration, that it is as much the interest of governors, as of the governed, that this grand right be religiously observed in all its branches. It is true that no government can subsist in the midst of licentiousness. But, *licentiousness* and *despotism* are only different names for the same thing. *Licentiousness* is a contempt of law, and right, and justice—is the dominion of passion, and caprice, and violence. And, what other definition can be given of *despotism*? In the midst of that anarchy which licentiousness introduces, those who have acquired the greatest influence over the multitude lead them at their pleasure, and usurp the most despotic power over the rest of the community. This power continues as long as the favour that produced it, and then gives place to another dominion, equally capricious and cruel. Society is thus agitated with unceasing convulsions till it sinks under absolute power, or a happy combination of circumstances establish the equal and impartial government of law, and of authority founded on its basis.

Despotism produces similar effects, though in an in-

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verted course. It levels all to exalt *one* ; and, acknowledging no title but force, tramples under foot every claim of right which is opposed to its dominion. But, as all power, when separated from justice, must fall before superior power contending with it ; and as slaves, whenever they have the courage to resist, and the sagacity to combine against, their master, must inevitably crush him ; so, every despot shares all the terror he inspires, and *joins trembling with his commands*. Knowing himself the enemy of mankind, he can place no confidence in their affection, and make no appeal to their justice. When his power begins to totter, the fear that restrains them is removed, and the interest that engaged them in his favour passes over to the quarter where it can be better promoted. While flattery is endeavouring to lull him to security, treachery is machinating his destruction ; and he is often overwhelmed before he has time to prepare either for resistance or for escape.*

To this situation, dismal even in its greatest pre-eminence and splendor, all abuses of power insensibly lead. Smaller violations of right are easily borne, because they are not generally or severely felt. This success tempts to greater oppression, while the lust and the advantages of power, stimulate to extend its limits,

* It is wonderful how nearly despotism, and pure democracy, approach each other. They are both the government of the mob, at least on many occasions. In pure democracy this is sufficiently evident. Despotism can only be maintained by the army ; and, when the army is numerous, it can depose the sovereign at pleasure. The Roman emperors were successively elected, dethroned and butchered, by the Pretorian guards. The Turkish Sultan is at the mercy of the Janissaries. See Gibbon's history of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, vol. i. chap. viii. p. 309. 8vo edition.

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and to ensure its duration. Oppression, at last, becomes necessary to its own support, and the fear of redress, suggests the accumulation of injustice. Abuses grow intolerable; violent resistance appears the only means of relief; and the moment which advances oppression to its completion, becomes the period of its overthrow. For, when the bodies of men are neither effeminated by luxury, nor enfeebled by climate, nor their minds brutified by ignorance, they cannot fail, sooner or later, to shake off the yoke of tyranny, and to break her sceptre in pieces. As in such circumstances, however, their lethargic passiveness is dispelled by extraordinary stimulants, and the furious passions of resentment and revenge are violently roused, the most atrocious acts of cruelty are exercised towards their oppressors, or those whom they conceive to have been joined with them in the odious combination against their species; and the vindication of violated right is thus often accompanied with the most flagrant injustice. In this manner human society, which should be the safeguard of human happiness, so frequently exhibits alternate scenes of rigorous despotism, and of furious anarchy; of injustice in the maintenance of usurped power, and of violence in the subversion of it; of gross abuses in the administration of governments, and of lamentable calamities in the reformation of them. The only stable government is that which is founded on equal liberty, limited by law, administered with moderation, supported by the combined interests of the whole political body, and displayed in the glorious effects of internal order, and external security—of improving industry, civilization, and virtue.

CHAPTER VI.*Of RIGHTS peculiar to certain STATIONS and ABILITIES*

BESIDES those rights, equally belonging to all, which have been above illustrated, there are others, which, although they are founded on the distinctions of rank and fortune, or on the general subordination which civil society requires, are nevertheless deducible from that notion of equality established in the first part of this Essay.

I. Those who are placed in the higher stations, and invested with offices of government and command, as they owe the discharge of these important functions to the public, are entitled, from this very consideration, to the obedience of those who are subjected to their authority. As members of the social body they are bound to promote its interest by the most effectual means in their power. The peculiar direction of this utility is determined by their offices themselves. This line cannot be pursued without the legal obedience and submission of the rest of the community. Hence that equality of obligation which binds the former to the just and zealous discharge of their functions, binds also the latter to a ready and cheerful subjection to their authority.

II. When the necessary balance of the political body, or that encouragement of merit which tends so powerfully to promote its highest interest, have raised

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a certain class of men to certain honors and privileges; these are, by that equality itself which subsists among all in their common relation to the public good, entitled to the advantages and respect which are annexed to their station, which the public welfare requires should be maintained in becoming splendour and dignity.

When, by political constitutions, peculiar marks of distinction are assigned to eminent talents and virtues, those who display them have a just claim on the public to the distinction which is their reward, and on every member of the community for the regard which that distinction requires. Views of public interest suggest such distinctions as incentives to merit, in order to extract from all the members of the social body the greatest possible sum of exertion, and to diffuse its influence over the whole. It is just, therefore, that those who contribute in the most distinguished degree to the common welfare should enjoy a proportionable share of honor and advantage, adapted to the peculiar manner in which their utility has been displayed. To deprive them of this would be to destroy their relation to the community, and that *equality* which consists in the common obligation of all to contribute to its benefit, and to receive a proportionate return.

III. When riches, acquired by honest industry, or enjoyed in virtue of those laws which perpetuate property, whatever be its value and extent, enable their possessors to relieve want, to soothe affliction, to diffuse around them a spirit of improvement, to encourage industry, and to make their superfluity circulate through the general mass of the community, they confer on the

opulent a just title to consideration and influence, in proportion to the superior benefits they bestow on all who are placed within the sphere of their action. It would be as unjust to deny them this consideration, as it would be to withhold from a day-labourer his hire, or from a good man the esteem which is his due.

IV. The same considerations give to the inferior ranks of society, and to the community in general, an equal right to demand that all delegated power and authority, as all civil power undoubtedly is, be employed solely for the ends for which it was conferred, and that all honorary distinctions, be neither bestowed on the undeserving, nor perverted to the purposes of pride, of insolence, and of oppression. The community at large has a right to demand that the legislative power be constantly directed by views of general utility, and not by partial systems which injure and distress the whole by throwing all advantages on one side of the political body; that the executive power never exceed its legal bounds, and, by an impartial administration of justice, maintain all in the equal enjoyment of their rights; that rank be supported with dignity, and tempered with the affability and condescension becoming every citizen; that wealth be not abused to introduce and foment profligacy of manners, or to abet injustice; and that talents be not perverted to disseminate opinions and principles subversive of virtue, and pernicious to society.

V. All men have an equal, though imperfect, right to those offices of humanity, which, while they cost the performers of them little trouble, are the sweeteners of social intercourse; and to the compassion and relief.

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of others, proportioned to their condition and circumstances, when they are overpowered by distress and calamity. This *right*, it is true, cannot be so defined as to admit of any individual's claiming a determined portion of the good offices of any of his fellow men; nay, the fulfilment of its obligations must from its very nature, be left to every one's judgment and feelings. But, as men associate for their mutual benefit and comfort, as humanity is interwoven with the human constitution, and as compassion with distress is one of the strongest feelings of our nature, it is undoubted that, to every situation which is calculated to call these feelings into action, a certain *right* is annexed to expect and require them, and a general obligation lies on all to advance the happiness of their fellow men by every mean in their power. As the ordinary offices of civility must vary according to the different conditions and ranks of men; so the compassion which is due to their distress, and the relief which it prompts to afford, must be greatly affected by the same considerations. For, as a loss which would ruin a man in narrow circumstances, would not at all affect a person of affluent fortune; so, on the other hand, there are situations which would appear to one in an obscure station highly eligible, which would overwhelm those of a more elevated condition with inexpressible dejection and anguish. What would seem to one person a singular benefit, would, to another in different circumstances, either be no benefit at all, or interpreted into a cruel affront. All then have an equal right to offices of humanity and kindness; but the degree and manner of these offices must be determined by the circumstances and rank of the persons towards whom they are exercised. This proportion is required by equality itself.

CHAPTER VII.

GENERAL INFERENCES *from the WHOLE of this BOOK.*

I HAVE now endeavoured to enumerate, and establish, as concisely as possible, the different *rights* that flow from the natural *equality* of men, considered in its proper light. Some of these are so essentially necessary to human happiness, that they cannot be violated without overturning the first principles of society. They are the fundamental articles of the social compact, for the maintenance of which mankind, if not explicitly, yet tacitly, and by the institution of civil society itself, have stipulated to relinquish some portion of their natural liberty, and to commit, to a certain number of its members, the concentrated power of the community for the benefit of all. Civil society annihilates not the natural rights of men, but fences, secures, and improves them. By circumscribing them by the limits which the political union requires, it condenses, as it were, their essence, and gives it greater strength and solidity.

Others of these rights flow, indeed, from the same principles; but, as they cannot be so precisely ascertained as to establish an exact and definite claim in every particular case, they may admit of a less rigorous observance, without wounding the vitals of human association. If those of the former class constitute the foundations of the social fabric, those of the latter indicate the means of its consolidation and highest im-

provement. When all these rights are maintained, according to their respective importance, as far as the human condition will admit, society is flourishing and happy under whatever form of political administration it may be placed. There are, it is true, certain forms of government, which, as their constitution itself threatens even the most important of them with destruction, are, therefore, essentially bad. But, there are others which maintaining the grand prerogatives of human nature, have a direct tendency to advance social happiness, though in different degrees. Under such governments mankind may always consider it as a fortunate circumstance to be placed. That government is the best in which all the inherent rights of human nature are inviolably secured, legal authority is maintained, and restricted to its objects, the power of the state is employed to promote the general happiness ; and *inequality* itself tends to preserve *equality* of law, and *parity* of obligation, among all the members of the community,

AN
ESSAY, &c.

BOOK III.

*What are the DUTIES resulting from the
EQUALITY of MANKIND?*

CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

THE division of my subject, on which I now enter, opens a field comprehending every social and civil duty, because every duty of this class supposes reciprocal obligations founded on the terms of equality, on which men associate. Nay, as in order to discharge the duties we owe to our fellow men, and fellow citizens, it is necessary to restrain our selfish passions within just bounds; and, as the Divine authority sanctions every human obligation and religion is the firmest bond of society, the duties of piety, as well as those of self-command and moderation, might be inculcated on the same principles. Hence a complete treatise of practical morality might be produced. But, as this Essay has already swelled beyond the bounds which I at first proposed to it, I shall confine myself to the consideration of these duties which directly flow

from the principles of equality already established, and from the rights which they confirm. The duties now to be illustrated will, therefore, correspond to the two grand divisions of ^mrights explained in the preceding Book*.

* Ch. II. III. IV. VI.

CHAPTER II.

*All MEN equally bound to RESPECT the PRIMITIVE RIGHTS
of HUMAN NATURE.*

AS the inherent *rights* of human nature are the fundamental articles of the social compact, for the maintenance and preservation of which civil society is constituted, every violation of these is not only an atrocious injury to the individual who suffers it, but is a direct attack on society itself. No pre-eminence or prerogative whatever can give a title to deprive an innocent member of the community of those rights, without which his existence is either precarious or miserable ; and every attempt to infringe them is, on the part of the aggressor, a renunciation of his social advantages, because these advantages are inseparably connected with the observance of the *rights* now under consideration. It is to substitute force in the place of *right*, and, of consequence, to acknowledge that superior power is entitled to make him submit in his turn. This principle, carried in every instance as far as it will go, tears asunder every social and civil tie, tramples under foot every dictate of justice, and introduces a state of unceasing hostility and violence.

Indeed, so essential are some of those *rights* to the very existence of society, that they are fenced and secured by the strongest civil sanctions. Life and property cannot be directly attacked without exposing the aggressor to the severest penalties. But in what a va-

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riety of indirect ways may injuries of this nature be offered, without any risk of human punishment? Life is destroyed not only by the dagger, or by the bowl, but by withholding the means of its support. Life is not so desirable on its own account, as on account of the enjoyments which it furnishes. Property is withdrawn from its lawful possessor, not only by robbery, or by theft, but also by every species of unfair commerce. Every deceitful practice, therefore, whereby advantage is taken, under whatever colour, of the ignorance or of the necessity of men, to deprive them of their property without an equivalent, is a violation of the right of property, and every oppressive act which cuts off or diminishes the means of a comfortable subsistence, is an attack upon life itself. To reduce men to the dismal necessity of dragging out existence in misery and contempt, to make them curse the day of their birth, and sigh for that of their dissolution, to render the tenderest of nature's ties an aggravation of distress; what is this but to spare life in order to perpetuate torment? And to this dismal condition how great a portion of the human race is reduced—a condition more abject than that of the brute creation, which nature has provided with the necessary supply of their wants, and given them desires for nothing more! Shall any rights whatever, derived wholly from political institutions, founded, for the most part, in barbarous ignorance and tyrannic oppression, be opposed to those clear and permanent *rights*, which the Creator has conferred on all men equally, by the gift of life itself, and by the natural faculties of providing for its supply! Shall he who cultivates the soil be deprived of an adequate share of the fruits which his industry produces, and pine in want, while the labour of his hands

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feeds luxurious idleness? Shall the *right* of property be established only for those who contribute nothing to the general stock, but consume and waste what the industry of others has provided, and shall that property which nature has bestowed on her children, in the faculties of their minds and of their bodies, be considered as a mark of degradation, and a badge of slavery?

How contrary are such sentiments, and the conduct they produce, to that just notion of equality above established, which represents every human being as a constituent member of the social body, and in his peculiar station, equally necessary, with every other, to the common welfare; which exhibits man to man as children of one common parent, as brethren connected no less by one common interest, than by one common origin, and discriminated, by different distinctions of occupation and place, merely that the general good may be more effectually advanced. For, although such views of society may, by some whose policy is but half wisdom, be classed among the theories of moralists, or the visions of divines, they are the only representations that can stand the test of reason, or bear the eye of inquiry.

Equally incumbent, on all men, is the duty to respect the *right* which every innocent individual has to *character* and *liberty*. But, how little is this duty regarded? Civil laws cannot do so much for the security of the rights, to which it relates, as for those of life and property; because it is not so easy to define, in every case, their exact extent, and much more is, on that account, left to the discretion and virtue of individuals. That degree of character which is assaulted

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by open and direct calumny, may, indeed, be always exactly ascertained, and every infraction of it become the subject of legal animadversion. This is also the case with regard to personal liberty. But, in how many instances may a character be ruined, without its being in the power of the injured person to find any legal redress; and how much may one's just liberty be circumscribed and infringed without any ground of legal complaint? The daily conduct of mankind towards one another, in these respects, is the strongest evidence both of the necessity of a civil government, and of its insufficiency for the security of human happiness. It manifests the malevolent propensities by which mankind are often actuated, and, of consequence, the necessity of coercive power; and, since these evil propensities burst out on so many quarters, notwithstanding the authority of laws, this evinces the great utility of philosophical and religious instruction, which applies to the understanding and the heart, and, by purifying the source of action, renders conduct more conformable to human nature, and more conducive to human felicity.

Do unto others as you wish them to do unto you, is a maxim that answers every case in which we can have any intercourse with our fellow men. It is founded on the equality of human nature, amidst all the diversities of condition and circumstances. It takes, as the rule of conduct, the feelings of every individual, supposing his condition were exchanged with that of the person towards whom he acts. It could never, therefore, be a just standard, if the same duties were not equally incumbent on all in the same circumstances. Now, with respect to reputation and liberty, which every human being so warmly cherishes, and so eagerly pursues,

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this rule ought to have peculiar efficacy. Yet, in these respects, it is most shamefully and frequently violated. It is astonishing to observe the general aversion to reproach and censure, and the general propensity to reproach and censure others; the high opinion which most people entertain of themselves, and wish the world to entertain of them, and their inclination to think ill of others, and to undervalue and diminish their good qualities. It is natural to suppose, that, as the experience of distress renders men prone to compassion,* so the love of character, and aversion from disgrace, which operate so powerfully in every human breast, would render men delicate in inflicting, on others, those pains which are so grievous to themselves, and in depriving them of those satisfactions which they account so delicious. But these sensations act, under the impulse of selfishness in a contrary manner. Men think that the reputation of others stands in the way of their own, and that *their* excellence cannot be exhibited unless those interposing eminences be thrown down, and the public eye wholly fixed on themselves. While men are thus employed in levelling each other, no real pre-eminence remains to any, and nothing is displayed to every judicious eye, but one wide extent of malignancy and corruption. Every one wishes his opinion of his neighbor to be believed; and his wish is granted. But the fulfilment of this wish equally wounds the characters of all. The blemishes he discovers in another, or imputes to him, are acknowledged; those which another lays to his charge meet with the same credit. Thus every one by endeavoring to exalt himself at another's expence, only points out the means of his own depression, and, by setting the example, provokes

* *Haud ignara mali miseris succurrere disco.*

the rest of mankind to use them. Such however, is the fascination of self-love, that the generality of men suppose themselves very little obnoxious to censure; and, while they are indulging the most vicious passions of the human heart, envy or revenge, they flatter themselves with the vain notion that their turpitude is unobserved. As often as I reflect on the prevalence of detraction, of obloquy, and of slander, I find it difficult to determine whether it proceeds more from weakness or from malignity; whether it is more an object of contempt or of detestation. What can be more malignant than to delight in the destruction of one of the dearest of human enjoyments? What more foolish and ridiculous than for a person to assault others, and to suppose that the attack will not be returned?

The same absurdity and injustice is conspicuous in the mutual conduct of men with regard to liberty. How few are ready on every occasion to grant to others the same freedom which they take to themselves! Such is the spirit of domination universally diffused, that what Pope limits only to one sex, is equally applicable to both—*the love of pleasure, and the love of power*. Indeed, the one necessarily draws after it the other. The love of pleasure produces the desire of the means of obtaining it, and of extending influence and power as far as possible. For why are men tyrants, but because they wish freely to indulge their inclinations, unrestrained by justice, unlimited by moderation? While self-love, therefore, is the predominant principle of the human heart, tyranny will not be confined to thrones and dominions, to principalities and powers, but spread through every sphere and condition of life. It is not so much the inclination as the power that is wanting;

and the temper, which is overbearing and unjust in private life, would be a Nero if seated on a throne. Let us only consider the fond attachment which most men have to their own opinions and mode of life, their eager desire to impose them on others, their impatience of contradiction, their propensity to square the actions of other men by their own rule, their lust of homage and precedence, their eagerness to rise above others, and to indulge their ambition in every little manner which their sphere presents to them, their resentment of affronts and injuries, apparent as well as real, their self-conceit and aversion from amendment—we behold the seeds of tyranny lurking in almost every human breast; and shall cease to wonder that, when great power is possessed, it should be so frequently abused. How seldom is the freedom of speech and action enjoyed even in the freest states of civil society! Let any one recollect what passes before his eyes every day; let him consider how often he is obliged to regulate his words, not so much by the internal sentiments of his own heart, as by the opinions and prejudices of those with whom he associates, and his actions, not so much by the immutable rules of duty, as by the fictitious standards of the world, and he will confess that none can enjoy the true freedom of a man, but he who has the fortitude to sacrifice to this exalted privilege, his most valuable temporal interests, and his chief social pleasures. Prejudices born of ignorance, or of pride, are nourished by education, strengthened by interest, or supported by that self-love which is humbled by the exposition of them. Custom and fashion have established arbitrary rules and forms, which however contrary to reason, it is considered as unlawful, at least, as highly ridiculous, to infringe. The man who pre-

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fumes to think, to speak, or to act, differently from the generality, even in matters of singular importance to the common good, is looked upon as an unsocial savage being, who separating himself from his species, is entitled to no share of their regard and affection. It is well, if he is not exposed to the severest effects of resentment and hatred.

Wealth and external dignity, although they cannot of themselves introduce one ray of light into the understanding, or implant one virtue in the heart, assume the privilege of dictating in matters of taste, of politics, of science, of morality, and of religion, and of bearing down all who subscribe not to their arbitrary decrees. The respect due to rank, and the influence which fortune justly claims, every man of sense and of integrity will readily acknowledge and bestow. But that a man's judgement should be measured by his title, or his merit, weighed by his gold ; that fortune and rank should not only possess their rightful precedence, but also usurp the honour which is equally due to genius and learning, to wisdom and virtue ; that a sensible and honest man should not dare to express his sentiments, because they are repugnant to those of another decorated with the badges of distinction, or possessed of a large estate ; is such a perversion of nature, such an infraction of liberty, as mankind could never be brought to endure but by those habits of servility which luxurious effeminacy has introduced. It will be answered, that this freedom, every man who chooses to use it, may enjoy. But at what expence ? at the expence of incurring the keenest displeasure of the exalted person whom he disoblige, and of feeling his power employed to ruin him and his nearest connections.

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But, why complain of the exorbitant and tyrannical pretensions of rank and fortune, when genius, which has already secured fame, frequently exhibits the same dogmatical and oppressive spirit? How often have those, whose literary character has already attracted the greatest consideration and respect, usurped a dictatorial power both in conversation and writing, contradicted without argument, keenly resented the smallest difference of opinion, even when their sentiments were manifestly absurd, shared out their approbation by the measure of flattery they received, and inflicted censure, not according to personal or literary merit, but according to the prejudice or disgust by which they were influenced. In reading the lives of some distinguished geniuses, I have found my indignation as much fired by their pride and insolence, and by the tame submission with which they were borne, as by the oppression of civil despots, and the servility of the rest of mankind. In fact, genius and reputation give as little title to domineer as fortune and rank. For, whatever mental superiority a many may display, he is inferior to others in many qualities, equally necessary to the common good as the talents he possesses. Brilliant powers are frequently counterbalanced by contemptible weaknesses, and great virtues by shameful vices. In proof of this assertion, I might instance the lives of some of the greatest literary characters.

As individuals are actuated by a tyrannical spirit, so nations claim to themselves the prerogative of reducing to slavery others inhabiting a different climate, or distinguished by a different colour of countenance. Aristotle, in that very book where he establishes the grand principles of a free govern-

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ment,* is not ashamed to assert, that the Greeks were destined, by nature, to rule the other nations of the earth ; and founds this right on their superior genius and civilization. Had that philosopher foreseen the present state of his own country, and that of those nations whom he considered as appointed to continue barbarians to the end of time, he would have acknowledged the futility of his argument. But the nations of Europe, who have exchanged barbarism for refinement, have adopted the same principle, and suppose that superiority of art and policy carries along with it the right of oppressing those whose state is still rude and uncultivated. The principles established in this Essay sufficiently evince that no pre-eminence of sagacity, wisdom, ingenuity, or strength can entitle any human being, or any society of men, to deprive others of the inherent and unalienable rights of human nature.

But, since principles directly contrary to these influence the generality of mankind, the present state of society is perfectly conformable. As few men have the courage to sacrifice their interest, their pleasure, or their fame, to their regard for truth and justice, the great concern is, to speak and act, not as reason and virtue dictate, but as interested views, in conforming to the opinions, humours, and manners of others, may require. For, how is the favor of the greater part of men to be caught, but by adulation and servile respect ? and what so efficacious for incurring their displeasure, as that manly and generous conduct and conversation, which indicate less solicitude to se-

* Politic. lib. i mo.

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cure favor than to enjoy self-esteem, a greater love of mankind than respect for individuals? Hence, most men have an opinion for every company they frequent, and change their sentiments oftener than their dress. The art of pleasing, reduced into system, and practised by every one who assumes the character of politeness, has given the same shape and coloring to the manners of all; and those prominent features, which characterize and distinguish, are rubbed off by the file of civility and fashion. Politeness is making constant demands—propriety imposing new laws—men are always the slaves of custom, and seldom follow the bent of their own genius and temper. Society is a species of stage, on which the actors appear in their turns, and play their parts. The real character remains behind the scenes. The great contest is, who shall act with the most powerful effect on the spectators, and produce the completest illusion. He is, therefore, most applauded, and bears the highest price, who appears least himself, and personates most successfully the assumed character. Should an uncivilized son of nature be introduced into our European circles, he would, at first, conclude that humanity and benevolence had there fixed their abode. But, as soon as he was informed that all this was but scenery and stage effect, he would be uncertain whether most to admire the skill with which the representation was conducted, or to detest the duplicity which could so completely assume the appearance of qualities, of which the reality was wanting.*

By these different infractions of the original rights

* See Rousseau, Discours sur les Sciences et les Arts, p. 12

of man above mentioned, society is reduced to its present unhappy condition, in which the Hobbesian state of nature appears in the midst of civilization and refinement. The interests, the pursuits, and the passions of men constantly acting in opposition, inspire, in the midst of unceasing competition, unremitting caution and solicitous jealousy. The specious mask of civility and complaisance is often assumed to conceal the most hostile designs. The language of nature is unknown, and the warm expressions of affection either fall to the ground destitute of all meaning, or are perverted to convey an ironical conception of contempt and dislike.*

How different would be the face of society, if the just equality of mankind were duly considered, and the inherent rights of human nature respected as they ought! But this consummation, devoutly to be wished, will only take place, when men shall believe and practise Christianity, and *do the will of their Heavenly Father on earth, as it is done in Heaven.*

* Fugere pudor, verumque fidesque ;

In quorum subiere locum, fraudesque, dolique,

Insidiaque, et vis, et amor sceleratus habendi.

OVID. Metam. l. 1. v. 130.

CHAPTER III.

The DUTIES of those who are placed in the INFERIOR STATIONS of LIFE or endowed with INFERIOR CAPACITIES and POWERS.

IF the distribution of abilities illustrated in the first Book*, and a diversity of ranks in society, be best calculated to promote the happiness, not only of the social body in general, but of every individual that composes it, how iniquitous and unreasonable is it to oppose this plan, and to complain of its arrangement, because it coincides not with the suggestions of ambition and caprice? When men despise those talents and that rank in life which divine providence has allotted them, and aspire at others for which they were never designed by nature, they aim at subverting that equality of obligation which assigns particular duties to particular abilities and situations, and requires them to be answered by others of a different order. For, if every man is at liberty to desert the post assigned him, and to invade another's province, how shall the inferior stations be filled, which are not less necessary to the general welfare than the more eminent? If, in the circumstances in which any given number of men can be placed, there be unavoidable hardships and inconveniences, why should these rather be supported by such as have never been accustomed to them, and are

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therefore totally unqualified for their duties, than by those whom education, and habit, have best adapted to such situations ? Yet, unless these inconveniencies be endured, these difficulties encountered by some, the stations in question must be deserted, and a void left in the order of society equally pernicious to public and to private interest.

Still, men complain of their situation, and eagerly aspire to others more exalted ! But, is there any real foundation for this discontent, for this restless desire of change ? Is it, as people pretend, that their present condition is more painful, more adverse to virtue, more inauspicious to the development and exercise of their powers, than those which they so fondly desire ? Or is it that men are better acquainted with the difficulties and temptations of their present situation, than with those of any other, have fondly magnified their own abilities, and ignorantly placed all excellence in the discharge of the duties of superior stations ? If we examine the case with impartial attention, we shall find no reason to hesitate in determining the question.

Men readily grant the complaints of those who are placed above them to be ill founded, and ascribe their dissatisfaction to their folly. They hastily presume that, if they were fixed in their situation, they would easily surmount its difficulties, resist its temptations, and fully discharge its duties. Their inferiors pronounce the same judgment with regard to them and their circumstances, and, if they envy, they are envied in their turn. A convincing proof this, that, in every condition, there are advantages as well as difficulties ; that, though none is exempted from inconvenience,

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none is absolutely insupportable ; and that discontent with a present station, and impatient desire of a higher, proceed from mistaken notions of both.

I beg that it may be considered that I am, at present, speaking only of the different ranks and situations of human society, as they are diversified for the common happiness of mankind ; and not of those singular conditions of distress and misery, which fall to the lot of individuals. In these, patience and fortitude may be recommended as duties and as consolations ; but contentment can hardly be required.

But, in surveying the different stations of life, although men grant that there are difficulties and hardships in all of them, they still believe that these diminish in proportion to the degree of elevation ; and fall, with the greatest weight, on those who occupy the lowest places. They fondly imagine, that, if they could ascend to a considerable height, they should there find some agreeable spot, where, unmolested and composed, they might survey the steep which they had climbed, and enjoy the delightful prospect opened around them. But, they reflect not on the difficulty of the ascent, on the giddiness of the situation, or, if they should chance to slip, on the severity of the fall. The pressure of corporeal wants, the burden of daily labor, and the humiliation of contempt, constitute the primary pains of a poor and ignoble condition. It is further deprived of the enjoyments which result from the cultivation of reason, and of the other nobler faculties of the soul, and is constrained to toil amidst the darkness of ignorance. If those, to whose share it falls, feel for the miseries of others, they are destitute of the

means of relieving them; and must suffer the pangs of compassion, without the divine satisfaction of beneficence. Pressed with their own distresses, feeling for those in similar, or in still more afflicting circumstances, and observing the superfluity of the toils of fortune, they are apt to envy their prosperity, to murmur at the Divine dispensations, and to practice violence or fraud, in order to obtain what their situation has denied them.

They consider not, however, that the pleasures of life depend not so much on the externals of condition as on the dispositions of the possessor; that what seems calculated to satisfy, and to limit, desire, serves often to inflame and extend it; that the enjoyments which are in men's power are not those which they really taste; and that to wish and to pursue is the unceasing employment of man upon earth. He who ascends a mountain, and beholds the view unfolding around him, is fired with greater curiosity to reach the summit, whence the utmost bounds of the prospect can be described. In like manner, no moderate exaltation in the scale of society can satisfy men, whose ambition is kindled, and whose activity engaged. Every step becomes only a help to rise higher; and desire continues importunate even after its objects are all exhausted. Alexander is the true emblem of ambition, which is restless while any thing remains above it; and, when it has reached the summit of its desires, weeps that the progress is finished!

Ye who envy fortune and rank, not so much for the sensual pleasures, or the indulgencies of vanity and pride which they afford, as for the sublime and elegant

enjoyments which they seem to offer, in the improvement of knowledge, the cultivation of genius, and the exercise of the noblest virtues of human nature—say if the engagements of public business, the contentions of ambition, the interruptions of company, the endless exactions of ceremony, the allurements of pleasure, can afford much leisure for the improvement of the mind, and the cultivation of elegant studies; or that when the reputation of wisdom, of learning, or of wit, is acquired without judgement, application, or parts, and flattery amply supplies every deficiency, there is any incitement to such noble and pleasing pursuits? In a low and indigent station, are there greater temptations to discontent and envy, than when success enflames ambition, and ambition spurns every inferior degree? Are the motives stronger to cultivate honesty, and to observe the dictates of justice, when the severity of punishment hangs over the head of the offender, than when concealment is promised by interest, inquiry removed by intrigue, or impunity secured by power? Is there less sympathy with the distressed, or less sincere joy on the prosperity of others, when men are reminded of their sufferings by the experience of their own, and depend for subsistence on their bounty and good opinion—than when luxury removes even the aspect of want, and opulence secures independence? Is there less piety and devotion, less reverence for God, when men literally implore him for *daily bread*, and depend for its supply on the continuance of health, and on the fertility of the seasons, than when, having *much goods laid up for many years, they eat, drink, and are merry**, and the immoderate draughts of plenty render

* Luke, xii. 19.

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 them forgetful of the bountiful hand that bestows it ?

Supposing, after all, that the advantages of cultivation and virtue are fully improved by those in the higher stations, in what do these exceed the same advantages of the inferior, so as to render them objects of envy, or causes of discontent ?—Has not every member of Christian society sufficient opportunity of acquiring the sublimest and most useful branches of human knowledge—the origin, the duties, and the destination of man—the relation in which he stands to his Creator and to his fellow men—the divine nature and perfections—the gracious plan of salvation the Deity has published to guilty mortals, by the mouth of his own Son, and by his inspired apostles—the glorious prospects opened to his penitent and amended children beyond the grave, and the gracious means he hath instituted for their perfection and felicity ? Do not the heavens, the ocean and the earth, unfold their magnificent and numberless beauties to the eye of the peasant, as well as to that of the monarch ; nay, do they not disclose to the former many ravishing scenes, which the latter can seldom behold ? Are not many even of the most striking and admirable displays of art, which riches have produced, and continue to support, equally enjoyed by the meanest passenger, as by the proprietor himself ? It is a gross mistake to suppose, that to provide for one's family by assiduous and honest labor, is less meritorious than to supply the poor out of an opulent fortune ; that patience is less commendable than generosity, resignation than munificence, meekness, than moderation, contentment than condescension ; that society is less benefited by being furnished with the necessities of life, than by being adorned

with the refinements of art, and by the productions of genius; that the public welfare is less promoted by dutiful submission to lawful authority, by an inoffensive, regular, and serviceable conduct, than by the enactment of salutary laws, by the judgment and punishment of offenders, and by a zealous and disinterested discharge of public trust. God accepts no less the artless devotion of the grateful, though uninstructed, heart, than the copious and swelling praises of the enlightened understanding. The coarser and brawny muscles are as necessary to the perfection of the body, as the organs of the most delicate texture.

It is thus evident, that real happiness and virtue are not limited to any station, but are equally open to all. If there is any exception to this conclusion, it must be in favor of the middling spheres of life—in which neither power and opulence tempt to oppression and dissoluteness of manners, nor poverty and ignorance lead to fraud and violence; in which neither pride hardens the soul, nor servility debases it; in which the best enjoyments of life are offered, and its greatest enticements to corruption excluded.

From all that has been said on this subject, it clearly appears, that as it is the duty, it is equally the interest of all who are placed in the inferior ranks of life, to discharge, with diligence and assiduity the humble offices of their station, to cultivate contentment with their lot, and to suppress the emotions of envy towards those who are more exalted.

It may indeed be objected, that the desire of rising is one of the most powerful motives to the honest

and active discharge of every social duty, that one great point of equality among men consists in the opportunity which all ought to enjoy of exercising their useful or elegant abilities, and that, if every one is to rest satisfied with the condition in which his birth or his circumstances have placed him, exertion must be discouraged, and the general welfare be deprived of the benefit which results from honest and generous ambition. We have, moreover, shown above, that frequent exchange of ranks and conditions seems to compose a part of the divine administration of human affairs. If those, therefore, whose situation is at present ignoble and depressed, are to consider it as a duty never to aspire higher, one of the strongest checks is removed from pride, namely, the uncertainty of its elevation, while dejection and poverty are deprived of one of their most powerful consolations—the expectation of more prosperous days.

It ought, however, to be considered, that the doctrine above inculcated tends not to preclude laudable ambition and industry, but only to suppress, on the one hand, discontent, avarice, and envy, and to remove every pretext for indulging these passions under the specious colorings of more elevated and generous motives; and, on the other, to comfort and strengthen those who are apt to view their inferior stations with an undiscerning eye, which beholds affliction where happiness may be found, and degradation where true dignity may reside. Nay, if our limits admitted of it, it might easily be shewn, that the faithful discharge of the duties of an inferior station, and that contented and cheerful mind which partakes of its greatest enjoyments, are the surest and safest means of advance-

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ment. I shall satisfy myself, however, with pointing out, in the following chapter, some important cautions with respect to the improvement of our condition.

CHAPTER IV.

*CAUTIONS to be observed in the PURSUIT of a HIGHER
and more FLOURISHING CONDITION.*

THE desire of improving one's circumstances ought never to lead to encroachment on the rights of others, whether natural or acquired. By the violation of the former, the fundamental principles of society are subverted; and, by that of the latter, the order necessary to its existence, is destroyed. Whoever, therefore, pretends to maintain any of the natural rights of man, by overturning that subordination and just order, which is the soul and the life of society, defeats the very purpose which he has in view, and exhibits either egregious folly or egregious wickedness. In either case, he becomes a dangerous enemy to the public interest, who is to be restrained and punished, to prevent him both from injuring others by his practice, and corrupting them by his example. Such, however, is the intemperance of human passions, even those of the most generous kind, when they are strongly excited, that the ardour of liberty, and indignation at oppression, often hurry men to pursue a conduct directly repugnant to the principles of equity and beneficence which they profess—to oppress others when they are contending for freedom; to be most iniquitous in defence of justice; and, with a view to promote the welfare of society, to overturn its foundations. Let the times in which we live, declare, in many instances, the truth of this assertion.

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II. The duties of the station, which people already occupy, ought to limit their endeavors after advancement. The co-operation of every individual for the public good, must first display its energy in the sphere in which he moves, and be thence transmitted to the other parts of the social body. By neglecting the duties of his present station, a person withholds the portion he is appointed to contribute to the general welfare, and, by encroaching on the province of others, may clog their exertion and frustrate their utility. To arrive at a more agreeable or more honorable station, the faithful discharge of the duties of a present one ought always to be the first means employed. When these are fulfilled, every fair and honest exertion is not only lawful, but even highly laudable, as the greatest activity of the parts then advances more effectually the prosperity of the whole. By embracing the opportunities which occur, and by exercising the talents with which men are endowed, they manifest their gratitude to Providence, and they improve its gifts to the greatest advantage.

III. The duties of any station to which men aspire, and their own ability to discharge them, ought to be considered before they attempt to obtain it. For, to occupy a station for which one has no capacity, or with the duties of which he is totally unacquainted, is both to expose his own folly, and to injure society, by betraying a trust which is committed to him. Hence, it is of the utmost consequence to acquire a complete knowledge of our own talents and qualities, which the generality of mankind are so apt to magnify, both to their own disgrace, and to the detriment of others. Inability to discharge the duties of any sta-

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tion, resulting whether from narrowness of understanding, from unhappiness of temper, or from infirmity of body, should be deemed an express declaration of the Divine will against the acquirement of it, and, of consequence, a boundary not to be passed.

IV. Men's exertions to improve their condition should be influenced by the consideration of the enlargement, or the contraction, of their utility. From the light in which every man appears as a member of human society, to whose benefit he is bound to contribute in the most ample manner possible, it is plain that it can never be lawful for any one to change his present situation for another, in which his utility must be impaired. This is to prefer private to public interest, to pervert the quality of a member, to demand more than is compensated, and to lose all that dignity and real enjoyment which result from the most extensive beneficence.

If, in the station desired, men may be equally useful, as in that which they occupy, private interest may be allowed its full force. If, together with advancement, opportunities of utility increase, every private and public consideration happily unites in stimulating to the pursuit of it, and every generous heart will wish and applaud the success.

Thus the rights of others, the duties of a present station, the talents requisite for a higher, and the more extensive utility, are the limits within which men ought to confine their exertions for the improvement of their circumstances. Thus, justice, diligence, ability, and public spirit, should be the constant attendants in the

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path of advancement, and the chief forwarders of the progress.

But, how little are these considerations regarded ! When interest or pleasure are constituted the sole springs of action, every duty that has no tendency to advance their ends is neglected, and offices, instituted for the benefit of mankind, are shamefully perverted to their prejudice. When the project is formed of rising to preferment without regard to merit, birth, interest or party-attachments, are the only valid grounds of pretension. To the most selfish considerations the most important interests of society are sacrificed. Before children can discover either inclination or capacity, offices are designed for them, and kept constantly in view ; nor were this to be censured, if proper care were taken to give them a suitable education, and their destination changed, when their temper and talents were perceived to be incompatible with it. But these things are seldom much considered. Whatever be the genius or improvements of the person in question, he must move in the particular sphere which has been chosen for him. The public welfare is treated as a chimera, which it is the business of a man well skilled in the ways of the world to use as a color to varnish the most interested designs, but which none, but an enthusiastic or vulgar mind, can think of adopting as a real object of pursuit. When the public welfare, however, is obstructed, private happiness can not long be enjoyed. For, as one chief cause of the disorder and corruption, which so often lay waste civil society, is the little attention which is shown to adapt men's condition to their abilities and tempers ; so the misery of individuals frequently springs from the same source.

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Men moving in a sphere for which they were never designed by nature, soon grow disgusted with their lot, and, finding the duties of their station irksome and oppressive, either neglect them altogether, to their own irretrievable disgrace, or continue to discharge them, in such a manner as is equally painful to themselves, and detrimental to others. Thus, Divine Providence takes vengeance on mankind for infringing its appointments, by allowing them to be bewildered in their errors, and the victims of their own infatuation.

CHAPTER V.

*The DUTIES of those placed in the HIGHER RANKS of LIFE,
and endowed with DISTINGUISHED ABILITIES.*

IT is certainly no easy matter for a person not to consider himself as greatly superior to the rest of his species, when every one of those who surround him pretends that his honor and dignity, his pleasure and service, are the only objects which occupy himself, and ought to occupy every other; when every one applauds, with servile adulation, his most insignificant sayings, and most ridiculous actions, and adores him as the source of wisdom, and the centre of power. When a person has so many occasions of beholding his fellow men in a contemptible light, it must require angelic moderation to abstain from treating them accordingly; to neglect those advantages which his circumstances and their servility put into his hands for gratifying his own passions and caprice, at the expence of their most valuable interests.

When, therefore, I consider this state of things, far from being surpris'd at the pride, and impatience of contradiction, which often characterize the higher ranks of life, or any species of distinction and eminence, I am more disposed to admire the condescension and humanity which they so frequently exhibit. For, these vices, though more observable in the higher spheres, because they are displayed in a more conspicuous

point of view, are by no means confined to these, but pervade every rank, every situation and profession of life. Hardly any attainments so low, any circumstances so circumscribed, as not to afford scope for self-sufficiency and ostentation. Who will not seem great, if he is as highly exalted as his ideas of greatness reach, and compares himself only with his inferiors: if he estimates his own knowledge by another's ignorance, his own wisdom by another's folly, his own power by another's impotence, his own wealth by another's poverty, his own virtue by another's depravity? On what other foundation, than on this partial mode of comparison, are built the pride and arrogance of even the most exalted of mankind? But, if we abandon this magical glass, which transforms the cottage into a palace, and the infant into a man, and contemplate objects in the true light of nature, we shall find, that the great dispute only is, who shall be esteemed the least ignorant, the least foolish, the least weak, the least indigent, the least corrupted; that pride and insolence, which subvert the parity of obligation subsisting among all, should be banished from every human breast, and that those who move in the highest and most illustrious spheres having the best opportunities of enlarging their minds, ought to regulate their opinions by their own knowledge, not by the ignorance of their inferiors, to acquire real dignity, by divesting themselves of passions, which are born of ignorance, and nourished by delusion; and, by moderation, equity, affability, and condescension, to conciliate benevolence, ensure respect, make the rays of virtue eclipse the splendors of fortune, and establish a throne which she neither can erect nor overturn.

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Would men, divesting themselves, for a moment, of the prejudices which birth, education, or luxurious habits, have fixed in their minds, survey, with the eye of reason, the construction of society, the principles on which it rests, and the ends which it pursues, and then contemplate the nature and perfections of the universal parent—what a different light would be thrown on their condition and circumstances, and how different a prospect be disclosed to them, from that which they have been accustomed to behold through the mists of ignorance, or the twilight of self-deception! Would it be possible for them to suppose that the Deity lavishes his bounty on individuals capriciously elected, merely for their pleasure and profit, and not with any view to the universal benefit; that he has bestowed on one authority and power, in order that he may encroach on the liberties, invade the properties, and overawe the consciences of his brethren, and not that he may protect innocence, restrain oppression, and maintain inviolate the interests of justice, of religion, and of truth; that, on another, he has conferred wealth and superfluity, only to furnish him with the means of indulging in luxury, or of wallowing in intemperance, and not to open to him a treasure for the supply of indigence, the relief of distress, the encouragement of industry, and the reward of merit; that he has adorned a third with sagacity and genius, that he may find an agreeable amusement for himself, gratify his passion for admiration, mislead the judgments, and corrupt the hearts of his fellow men, not that he may enlighten, and improve, and lead them to happiness, through the path of virtue? Can any man of a sound mind, who allows himself a moment's reflection, impute such a scheme to infinite goodness and wisdom, or consider it

in any other light than in that of the most atrocious rebellion against the Divine government?—A person raised to a high office, placed in exalted rank, or adorned by distinguished abilities, is established on an eminence that his views of the general good may be more extensive and correct, and that he may apply, to its advancement, the powers he possesses with the greater advantage and success. As on an eminence, therefore, the eye is diverted from proximate to remoter objects; so, in an exalted station, the narrow concerns of self should be less regarded than the grand and magnificent range which the public welfare presents to the mind.

Nor does this view of things diminish, in the smallest degree, the advantages resulting from eminent rank, fortune, or abilities; on the contrary, it greatly enhances them. For, if we exclude the opportunities which these afford of widely diffusing beneficent influence, and, with the imitation of the divine perfections, of sharing in some measure the divine felicity; what else remains but the meanest gratifications of human nature, but an augmentation of misery with an augmentation of vice, & a total degradation of all that distinguishes man from the brutes? If the rich enjoy not the pleasure of munificence, of clothing the naked, of feeding the hungry, of supporting the falling family, of rearing the orphan, of sweetening the cup of shame-faced uncomplaining poverty, without ruffling the veil that hides her from public view; if the powerful are denied the satisfaction of protecting innocence, of restraining oppression, of drawing modest merit from its retirement, and, by the just reward of honor, of rendering it conspicuous and exemplary, of defending substantial virtue against faction and intrigue, and of promoting the public good by noble and

useful undertakings ; if the wise, the ingenious, and the learned, are denied the enjoyment of comforting affliction of instructing ignorance, of directing perplexity, of correcting prejudice, and of reclaiming vice ; what remains but the more copious indulgence of sensuality—but the gratifications of the most ruthless passions that convulse the breast which they occupy—and the indulgence of the most contemptible, though frequently the most pernicious, vanity displayed by attempting to subvert the grand principles of morality, and to poison the divine consolations of religion ? Is there in these any thing which a man of judgment would value, desire, and pursue, as primary objects ? Were such a person informed, on his first setting out in life, that such would be all the enjoyment he should reap from the fondest objects of his pursuit—would he consider the purchase as a sufficient recompense for his toil and anxiety, his frequent mortifications, and assiduous study ? I assert not that the man, who devotes wholly to selfish purposes the advantages he possesses, has no pleasure, no enjoyment. The sensualist, the miser, the vain, the ambitious, the proud, have each their particular gratifications. But these gratifications are unmanly and base, and fall infinitely short of the delights of a faithful discharge of duty, and of the sublime enjoyments of beneficence. Nor can it be alledged that enjoyments being matters of taste, it is impossible to ascertain their comparative values ; because every man will be partial to his own, and, while the generous extol the joys of beneficence, the selfish will ever find their happiness in those which center in themselves. For, in order to compare the different sources of felicity, it is necessary to taste them ; and this can only be done by men of an exalted and capacious soul,

who can relish in the highest degree both the pleasures which attach to self, and those which result from benevolence. By feeding the hungry, does any man spoil his own appetite? By relieving the distressed, does he diminish his own relish of easy circumstances? By maintaining peace and order in society, does he contract his imagination, or diminish its powers? By comforting the afflicted, by instructing the ignorant, or by advising the perplexed, does he render his conception less clear, his judgment less solid, or his memory less tenacious? On the other hand, it is certain that a contracted selfishness weakens and extinguishes the benevolent affections, and excludes the pleasures they confer. The man who seeks in wealth only the means of indulging his sensuality, and promoting his convenience, who aspires at power, only to gratify his pride and ambition, or who pursues knowledge only for his own amusement or vanity—such a man can have but little relish of the joys that spring up and flourish in a social and benevolent heart.*

What is it that, in all the actions, and all the characters, whether presented by daily observation, recorded in history, or figured by imagination, excites admiration, and engages esteem? Is it merely extent of capacity, superiority of station, or largeness of fortune; or is it liberality of sentiment, and kindness of heart? Place the faithful friend, the affectionate parent, the indulgent master, the generous patron, the incorrupt magistrate, the genuine patriot, in the most disadvantageous circumstances; let him be sunk in poverty; over-

* Hence, Aristotle very justly asserts, in several places of his Ethical writings, that the good man is the only proper judge of happiness.

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whelmed with disgrace, tortured with pain, he will still preserve his dignity, and command our respect ! Nay, the less he enjoys of the advantages, and the more he suffers of the evils, of life, the more glorious will he appear ! But no favorable concurrence of circumstances, neither the gifts of nature, the accomplishments of arts, nor the splendors of fortune will ever be able to bribe our esteem in behalf, I say, not of the sensualist, the villain, or the tyrant, but even of the unsocial solitary mortal, who, though he offers no positive injury to his species, yet with-holds his endeavors for their happiness ! Nay, if such a supposition be not impious, remove goodness from all the other divine attributes, and suppose the Supreme Being unconcerned for the happiness of his creation, and say whether his nature would then appear as amiable, adorable, and transcendently excellent, as it now appears to every reflecting mind. And if goodness constitute the supreme glory of the divine nature, that which gives to every other perfection its true beauty and light, and completes the real character of Deity—is it possible that any human excellence or advantage should compensate for the absence of this primary virtue ?

If the true excellence of human nature, thus, consists in benignity, if this necessarily attracts the regard of the selfish themselves, how comes it to pass that so many who have the noblest opportunities of gratifying a disposition so beautiful and glorious, can be reconciled to a contrary conduct—to sensuality, oppression, and perversion of the finest abilities ? The weakness, the blindness, and the corruption of human nature, are the only satisfactory causes that can be alledged.

But, even in actions the most apparently selfish and groveling, a discerning eye will be able to discover some faint gleams of generosity which illumine and recommend them. Sensuality is clothed with the specious coloring of sociality, of pleasure communicated as well as received, of jocularly and mirth, of freedom, and contempt of servile restraint. Oppression and tyranny are presented to the mind under the appearance of dignity, of a high sense of honor, a noble ambition, attachment to party, nay, even of a love of justice. Without these fictitious images, the sensualist would appear to himself as the most contemptible, and the oppressor as the most odious, of mankind.

But, why multiply arguments in a matter where a moment's feeling is more decisive than an age of reasoning? Had you ever a faithful friend, into whose bosom you poured all the secrets of your heart—a parent, whose burden of years you lightened, whose tottering limbs you supported—a child, whose assiduous duty, whose budding virtues, sweetened all your cares of the present, and brightened all your hopes of the future—did ever the sympathetic gush start in your eye at the sight of misery—did ever your hands stretch forth the unexpected relief, and dispel the gloom that hangs on the brow of woe, as the sun, bursting through the clouds, renews the face of nature—did you ever discharge an important trust with dignity, disinterestedness, and honor, and spread peace and joy among your fellow men, while *the ear when it heard you blessed you, and the eye when it saw you gave witness to you**—say what delight these recollections afford—would you exchange

* Job, xxix, 11.

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them for a life-time of the most refined sensuality—
for Peruvian treasures—or Asiatic power ?

It appears, then, that the dignity of human nature consists not in the greatness of men's abilities, wealth, or dominion, but in expansion, and benignity of soul ; that the former are only means of promoting the purposes of the latter, and signs that their possessors are particularly called, by Divine appointment, to generous and elevated action ; that one, who possesses all these advantages, may be more contemptible than those, who, though devoid of them, have the heart which could apply them to their proper ends ; and that one firm purpose of doing good, will adorn a character more than the acutest understanding, the most opulent fortune, or the most exalted rank, unaccompanied with a virtuous disposition. Hence, to be filled with pride and contempt of those below us, on account of our talents, or external circumstances, without any regard to the right application of them, is both to act unjustly, by acting inconsistently with the character of members of the community, and usurping the rights which belong to it alone, and to overturn the basis on which true superiority must ever rest. It is to content ourselves with the shadow, without the substance, of greatness ; and, while God and men unite in calling us to a pre-eminence and happiness which neither time, nor fortune, nor death can remove, to descend to the most contemptible of all conditions, by perverting the most splendid powers, and the richest opportunities—to embrace the hideous form of misery while celestial felicity courts us—to change a fertile field into a barren heath—to dwell in a dungeon while we may walk in the most resplendent day. In a word, it is the duty of those

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who are raised to the higher stations of life, possessed of the gifts of fortune, or endowed with superior abilities—to maintain justice, order and peace, in society; to study and pursue the public good; to relieve distress, to encourage industry, to reward merit, to exercise condescension and affability towards their inferiors; to cultivate and extend useful and elegant knowledge; to establish, and inculcate, the grand principles of morality and religion, to enlighten, humanize, and improve mankind, and to lead them to virtue and happiness.

Those who employ in this manner the opportunities and talents with which they are furnished by Divine Providence, are entitled to the highest veneration of mankind. It is then, that nobility, illustrious station, or distinguished parts, appear in their full splendor, and exhibit their possessors as a species of divinities upon earth, who, bearing the resemblance of God as far as human nature will permit, share also his felicity, and claim the homage of the world. Let them be displayed as the instruments of beneficence, they will reign with an irresistible and permanent dominion, which neither envy, nor malice, nor faction, nor tumult, will be able to overturn; for it is founded in the hearts of men who, feeling, and rejoicing in, its blissful influences, must cease to love themselves, before they can wish to withdraw their respect and obedience.

But, when riches are only the fund of a sordid avarice, or the fountain of licentiousness and profligacy; when wisdom is perverted into craft, and abilities transformed into the ministers of cabal and intrigue, of deception and ignoble policy, establish, uphold, or extend, civil or religious despotism; when resplendent genius

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is employed in rebellion against God, and in the corruption of men, by propagating irreligion and immorality; when pre-eminence and authority are in civil life, used as the instruments of pride, injustice, oppression, and cruelty, or supreme power impelled by insatiable ambition, deluges the earth with blood, and spreads devastation and misery through the habitations of men—reason easily penetrates the false glitter that surrounds them, and perceives their deformity and blackness. She declares their lustre to resemble that of those noxious vapours, which, rising from the earth, are kindled into a flash in the sky, and terminate in noise and destruction; while those who apply their talents, their riches, or power, to the beneficent ends for which they are destined, are like that glorious luminary in the heavens, which shines with a constant and salutary light.

Thou proud insolent mortal! who lookest down from thy lofty station on thy brethren of men, and imaginest them only formed to bring their gifts to thy altar, and to bend before thee with servile homage, know that thy elevation only renders thee more conspicuously contemptible! Consider that, should those whom thou so insolently despisest, adopt thy principles, and burst the bands of social union by which alone they are made thy dependants, the power is theirs, and thine only the shadow and the phantom. Should they only withdraw their support without inflicting any positive evil, thou wouldest precipitately sink into a degradation lower than that of the meanest laborer. Less inured to want, thou wouldest be less able to provide for its supply, and have less reason to expect it from the benignity of others. Consider that, even in thy pre

lent elevation, thou art really more dependant than the most ignoble of the sons of men. If he is least dependant who stands least in need of others, he is surely most dependant who stands most in need of them. With our rank, our necessities, our demands, our cares, increase. The links by which we are joined to our fellow men are multiplied, and the very circumstance which enlarges our influence diminishes our internal strength. He, therefore, who has the greatest number of dependants, has only the greatest number of those to whom he is indebted for consideration and power. The more lofty and spacious the edifice is, with the greater precipitation, if its pillars are sapped, does it rush into ruin. Learn then to seek thy importance and dignity, where only thou wilt find them, by discharging every duty which thy station requires, and by diffusing, by thy affability and beneficence, happiness among mankind. Relinquishing the phantoms of pride, enjoy the substantial pre-eminence of virtue.

But ye ! who employ your distinguished abilities, or exalted power, for the purposes for which Providence has bestowed them, fear not that any portion of that respect, obedience, and honor, to which you are entitled, will be withdrawn. Goodness, moving in an elevated sphere, and guided by distinguished wisdom, shines with such an amiable lustre, possesses such a commanding influence, and is so irresistibly attractive, that she reigns over the hearts of men, and is often constrained to blush at the homage she receives, because it approaches adoration. Power may intimidate, splendor may dazzle, genius may surprise and delight, but goodness alone can captivate the heart !

CHAPTER VI.

DUTIES *common to ALL with regard to the USE of their*
OPPORTUNITIES and TALENTS.

WHOEVER attentively examines the human constitution will discover in it several inconsistencies not so easily accounted for. Thus, mankind have a strong propensity to society, and are miserable without it; yet in society they are prone to indulge the most unsocial dispositions. Nature constantly draws them to their species, and points out their sweetest enjoyments, as solely derivable from this source; yet the selfish part of our frame, counteracting this dictate of nature, corrupts the grand streams of happiness, by turning them into its own channel, and, instead of allowing the individual to act as a member of the social body, and to receive from this capacity his highest dignity and enjoyment, endeavors to render society subservient to the individual. There is in all men a wonderful fondness of independence, and a no less surprising desire of the service and respect of others. This is, in fact, to join the greatest contradictions, to force into union things absolutely incompatible; for independence can only be secured, by an entire separation from mankind, by relinquishing every claim to their good offices and regards, by renouncing every social enjoyment, and by deriving happiness from the stores of self. As soon as man enters into the social circle, and shares its beneficial influences, he relin-

quishes his separate existence, and forming a part of a system, is limited by the relations which he bears to the other parts, and to the whole, becomes bound to contribute to their support and perfection, according to the support and benefit which he receives from them, and is required to exert a beneficial activity proportioned to the influence he possesses. Whoever withholds from the general good any portion of useful effort he is able to bestow, is unfaithful to the conditions, on which he enjoys the benefits of society, and violates that equality of obligation which subsists among all mankind. He also frustrates, as far as lies in his power, that plan of Divine wisdom, whereby the general felicity is intended. For it is certain that the Universal Parent has distributed among men such a portion of abilities and powers, as, duly cultivated and improved, would render the condition of all comfortable, in every respect, and happy. In the present state of society, some are, indeed, overburthened with labor, and enjoy but a small degree of convenience; while others loiter in indolence, and consume the fruits of industry. This, however, could never be the case, did every one cultivate with diligence his peculiar talents, and discharge the duties of his peculiar station. It is the neglect of this alone that makes it necessary to overload some, in order to support that part of the common burden, from which others have treacherously withdrawn themselves.

Hence the principle of *equality*, above illustrated requires not only that all men should religiously regard the rights of others, but that they should exert themselves, to the utmost of their ability, for the common benefit. Whoever rejects this requisition descends below the rank of a member of society, and, instead

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of rising, as is foolishly supposed, above the rest of mankind, by a life of idleness and dissipation, degrades himself to the condition of a beggar, who lives on the labor of others, without making any just return for it. For, however strange it may sound, it is undoubted, that society has a right to the best exertion of all its members, of the highest as well as of the lowest, of the most opulent as well as of the poorest, for the common good.

The question is not, what advantage every individual is content to reap from his own powers and opportunities, but what degree of general utility he can effectuate. These powers have not been bestowed on him, by their divine author, solely for his own use, but chiefly for the benefit of the human race, to whose happiness he is destined to contribute. This proper exercise of the powers of every individual all the other members of society have a right to demand, on fair and equal terms. The equivalent every individual obtains by the advantages and comforts which he receives from social life, and still more by that superfluity which enables any one to live in sloth. He is a debtor to the grand community of mankind, and his creditors can call him to repay.

It is true that, since it is so difficult to determine the extent of every one's capacity, and the exact measure of the social advantages he enjoys, no precise claim can be established in every particular case. But, the general obligation remains equally strong on all, and none can wilfully violate it without incurring the blame of his own mind, and the displeasure of the author of his existence. The principle, therefore, on which

some ancient legislators prohibited any citizen, of whatever condition or rank, from living in idleness, was perfectly just in itself, although the execution of any law grounded upon it must ever be extremely difficult, and might occasion greater inconveniencies than those which it should be intended to obviate.

As indolence, and the neglect of opportunities of utility, are highly unjust, so they are extremely contemptible. For, what character can be more the object of contempt, than that of a person who, though endowed with active powers, and furnished with ample opportunities of benefiting that particular society to which he belongs, and from which he receives constant defence and protection, yet lives on the labor, either of his predecessors or contemporaries, without testifying any approbation of their industry, by which he subsists, or making any efforts to imitate their laudable example? What can degrade a man more in his own eyes, than the consideration that he has done nothing to benefit his friends, to oblige his neighbors, to educate and establish his children, or to promote the interest and honor of his country; that he has buried his talents, defeated the end of Providence in bestowing them, and that, when he is cut off by death, the world will be delivered from an unnecessary burden, from a putrid excrescence?

On the other hand, what can convey, to any person, a higher idea of his own worth and importance, than the reflection that, though but an individual endowed with one class of abilities, yet, by their improvement, he not only enlarges his own enjoyments, but diffuses around him the most joyous influences, and promotes

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the welfare of the whole human race ; that, though retired from public view, he appears in the useful productions of his application and genius ; that, though infirm in body, he renders, by his inventions, the labor of the strong and hardy both more easy to themselves, and more beneficial to others ; and that, though devoid of public authority, he strengthens the political union, and advances public order by the just principles which he establishes and elucidates ; that, taking another view of the case, though ignorant and illiterate, yet he contributes, by his toil and dexterity, to the instruction and improvement of mankind, while he provides sustenance and leisure for those who are endowed with genius and learning, or placed in those stations where plans of general welfare can be best conceived, and proposed with the greatest prospects of success ? In fine it is an exalting consideration, that, however obscure a person is in himself, he is an instrument in the hand of Providence for communicating to mankind, not only the necessities of life, but also its highest ornaments and delights, and even of raising their views above this terrestrial abode, and directing them to a state of endless felicity, the certainty of which cannot fail to produce the most salutary effects on every part of their conduct. No person is so mean and insignificant, as not to affect some part of the community. In a grand piece of machinery, the smaller wheels and pins, though less observable, are not on that account less necessary than others to the just motion and effect of the whole. In like manner, the conduct of the inferior members of society not only affects their own happiness, or that of their immediate connections, but diffuses its influence, though in a less perceptible manner than that of the higher ranks, through the whole so-

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cial body. Nay, I may assert that, as these compose the greater part of the community, their useful industry is still more requisite to the general happiness ; and that the meanest laborer, who diligently and honestly exerts himself in his sphere, is entitled to share, with the most exalted of the sons of men, the glorious appellation of the friend of mankind, and of the approved of God ! Should any whom fortune depressed, or insolence laughs to scorn, but whose soul, rising above his situation, feels the intrinsic dignity of man, and laments the narrowness of his terrestrial sphere, cast his eye on these pages, let him be comforted and strengthened by the reflections above mentioned. There is something in the idea that exalts the mind, that kindles the desire of usefulness, that rouses activity, and puts every faculty in motion. When we consider it, we seem desirous of breaking the inglorious chains of indolence, and pant for some worthy object, some important pursuit, to exercise the generous energies of the soul !

If the consideration of the importance of the meanest member of society should prove a strong argument to useful diligence, how much greater force must this argument acquire with regard to those whom fortune and rank particularly distinguish. Their influence, whether good or bad, is very extensive. First communicated to numerous connections and dependants, it is conveyed through them to other contiguous relations, till it reach at last the extremities of the social system. Were this influence always of a beneficial nature, society would feel its salutary effects through all its frame, and, instead of that distempered and deformed face which it so frequently wears, would assume the most

healthy and smiling aspect. The face of nature, long hid in fog, or ravaged by tempests, receives not a more delightful transformation from the returning sun, than society would receive from those benignant lights which thus illumined and invigorated it.

In what light, then, must those persons appear, who, because their external circumstances free them from the necessity of laboring for their subsistence, imagine themselves exempted from every species of useful exertion ; who, because they are provided with the abundant supply of every corporeal want, think themselves under no obligation to improve their minds, or to engage in any pursuit conducive to the common welfare ; who either yawn away their time in the most lethargic indolence, or devote it to the most insignificant, frivolous, or vicious enjoyments ; who waste ingenuity in mere ostentation, degrade reason to purvey for appetite, and make recreation their study, and amusement their business—in a word, whose whole life is either a blank, or a perversion of existence. The phantom of pleasure, like an *ignis fatuus*, instantly disappears, when they think they can seize it. The same insipid round is run over a thousand times. The senses are jaded, the appetites cloyed. Tired at last with the tedious pursuit, those votaries of pleasure, like the top that has long been lashed, doze in the arms of indolence. When they awake at times from their insensibility, their minds are haunted with all the chimeras, all the monsters of vapour and spleen, which often drive them to burst, by death, the ponderous fetters with which they are loaded.

I will not assert, that all who live in this manner

are sensible of the criminality of their conduct, and perceive that, however averse from injustice, breach of trust, and cruelty in their dealings with particular persons, they yet involve themselves, by this negative vice, this neglect of the due improvement of their talents and opportunities in these crimes with respect to their species in general. No; I am convinced that, if they clearly perceived the tendency of their conduct, many of them, at least, would review it with sorrow and disgust. Ignorance, and wrong habits contracted in early life, more than any vicious disposition, are the causes of a course of action so disgraceful and unhappy to themselves, and so detrimental to society.

This reflection, however, if it diminish their criminality, augments the folly of neglecting to cultivate those rational faculties, which would afford them just notions of their duty, and disclose an elevated region of pursuit and happiness. For, if they rightly apprehended the relation in which all the members of society stand to each other, they would perceive that it is not only the rapacious invader, or the secret purloiner, of property, who must be reputed injurious, but also the indolent and the dissipated, who deprives his fellow men of any benefit which he is called to bestow. They would see that they are under obligations, not only to abstain from positive violations of justice, but also to discharge many duties of distinguished utility to mankind. To these they would acknowledge themselves particularly called by the appointment of Heaven. Relieved from the necessity of providing for their corporeal wants, their minds are furnished with greater freedom for the exercise of its nobler powers, and with a more extensive range for the discovery and

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prosecution of schemes of public good. And as those clouds that obscure their understanding began to remove, an hundred untasted springs of felicity would open on their hearts. For, if every person of fortune and rank employed his most active endeavors to excite and maintain a spirit of industry and virtue among his dependants, his neighbors, and fellow-citizens, he would find his time and attention so happily engaged, that he would survey with contempt his former pleasures ; he would seem to breathe a purer air, and to live in a region of perpetual sunshine, while the vapours of low ambition and of sensual indulgence rolled below his feet !

Man can only be happy in as far as his powers are duly exercised ; and those powers, which are the most elevated and capacious, afford the greatest sum of felicity. The same means, therefore, which render any man most highly beneficial to others, also increase the sum of his own enjoyments, and superadd to them that most delightful of all satisfactions—the consciousness of having discharged, to the utmost of his power, his duty as a member of the community, and fulfilled the intention of his Creator in sending him into the world. The neglect of the due improvement of any power, or of any opportunity of honorable action, detracts just so much from personal enjoyment. As want of circulation corrupts the air, and stagnation the water, so, indolence superinduces a torpor on the mind, which unfits it even for the more refined pleasures of sense, and deprives it of that great sweetener of every enjoyment, the reflection that it is the produce of our own exertions, and natural recompence of merit. With regard to distinction, acquired by successful exertions of abilities, it is certain, that

the same obligation which demanded the first display of them, requires their continuance while any benefit can thence result to mankind, and their possessors are able to confer it. He who has already exerted powers, by which the aggregate of common good has been increased, has pledged himself to a course of distinguished utility, and, if he relaxes or ceases his efforts, while his faculties are still vigorous, is more culpable than if he had never entered on the honorable career; because practice procures facility, and success should animate to fresh enterprise. If selfish ambition should, as is in this case most probable, be the sole motive to action, let it be considered, that it is perhaps more difficult to preserve than purchase reputation and homage. The ensigns of honor attract the public eye; elevation places men in a more conspicuous light, where every defect, as well as every virtue, is more clearly discerned, and more nicely scrutinized. If those, therefore, who are thus distinguished, are not able to support their situation with dignity, their disgrace will, from the disappointed expectations of mankind, be more humiliating, and the contempt which they incur more general. Envy will magnify every fault, annihilate every virtue, and lash them with the laurels which she has torn from their brows. Happy for themselves and happy for the world, whose interests are always hurt by the degradation of merit, if they had never risen above the vulgar level!

CHAPTER VII.

CONCLUSION.

THE view of society, and of the principles on which it is founded, disclosed in this Essay, evinces the obligation of all its members, of whatever rank or description, to contribute their most active and honest endeavors for the common good. Indeed this obligation is sufficiently inculcated on the lower classes, by the necessity of laboring for their daily subsistence, and by the dreadful consequences which idleness produces to them and their families. With regard to these, it is, therefore, less necessary to unfold the full force of this obligation, than with respect to those whose easy circumstances, seeming to render them independent of their fellow men, seem also to exempt them from every debt beyond the limits of strict justice. This independence we have shewn to be purely imaginary, and utterly incompatible with the principles of social union. The chain of dependance runs equally through all the orders of society, and binds every individual in these orders. While it excludes the extravagant claims of self-love, and subjects men to more generous and salutary principles, it establishes at the same time a system which, if universally observed, would fully secure the most essential interests of each individual, by settling them on the broad and immoveable basis of general welfare. For, did the rich employ their wealth to supply the wants of the poor; the poor, their labor to

administer to the ease and convenience of the rich ; the great, their power and authority to protect the weak and defenceless ; the wise, the ingenious, and the learned, their abilities to instruct and counsel the ignorant and illiterate ; did every one, in short, impart to his fellow men a portion of the fruits of his talents and advantages ; it is impossible that any should repine at another's possessing what was employed for his own benefit, nay, was made more subservient to his use, than if he himself were the proprietor. For no individual could so perfectly cultivate all the different talents, necessary for his support and welfare, which are distributed among the species, and, while some particular one is allotted to each, are all carried to the highest improvement of which they are susceptible.

Thus, the principles of equality which we have established, at the same time that they repress the influence of pride, the outrages of oppression, and the dissipation of sensuality, confirm, nevertheless, the necessity of subordination, and the just demands of lawful authority. They maintain inviolate every natural and every civil distinction, draw more closely every social tie, and unite all in one harmonious and justly proportioned system, which brings men together on the even ground of the inherent rights of human nature, of reciprocal obligation, and of a common relation to the community. Yet, for the maintenance of this equality itself, they separate them into different classes, and invest them with different capacities and offices. Thus are the poor and the mean reconciled to their circumstances, or comforted under them—the opulent and the powerful are excited to beneficence and clemency ; the ingenious and acute are directed to the

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best use of their abilities ; and all are linked together by the powerful ties of common interests, and of reciprocal duty. Happy those, whose souls are capable of rising to such enlarged views of things, and are animated by them to a conduct worthy of human nature, worthy of Christianity, which represents men to each other as children of one parent, as members of one family, as journeying together through the chequered scenes of this transitory world, towards a region where all the distinctions of poverty and riches, of obscurity and splendor, of power and meanness, shall cease, every inequality disappear ; where virtue alone shall be exalted, and vice degraded forever !

It must, indeed, be acknowledged, that this theory is too pure and exalted to admit of a complete conformity of practice. But man is qualified for endless improvements in knowledge and virtue, and the happiness which he attains will exactly correspond to the degrees of his progress. In every art and science there is an ideal model, which can never be reached even by the most exact and beautiful execution. What Cicero observes with regard to a perfect orator, that he had never seen any speaker that could come up to his notions of eloquence, is not limited to that art, but is equally applicable to every other. It is, however, to be observed, that even the excellence which is attained, is wholly referable to the perfect standard previously existing in the artists mind. In proportion, therefore, as clear and elevated ideas of excellence are entertained in religion, in morality, and in politics, and action is directed by these, human conduct and happiness will be improved and exalted. If, on the other hand, low and grovelling standards are adopted, and principles are re-

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gulated by established practice, not practice reformed by the genuine principles of nature, mankind will continue to tread in the old and muddy path, and the progress of the world will be marked with degeneracy and degradation.

It is the constant objection of those, who are either averse from improvement, or too indolent and too timid to begin or advance it, that the perfection aimed at is too high for human nature. They thus employ the existence of abuses and errors as a reason for perpetuating them. But if the same reasoning had always been considered as just, mankind would, at this day, dwell in caves, feed upon acorns, fall down before the works of their own hands, and be bound in the heavy chain of Heathen ignorance and superstition. The institutions and refinements of civil society must appear to a savage as extravagant and impracticable, as the finest theory of moral sentiment and action appears to those whose souls are immersed in sensuality, or fettered by self-interest. The question is not, what is the present practice of mankind, but what they are qualified ultimately to attain; not how far any theory is conformable to the present state of things, but how far it is founded in nature, adapted to the human faculties, and conducive to human felicity.

If the principles illustrated in this Essay should be devoid of every other recommendation, they have at least, that which is no inconsiderable one, of being conformable to the doctrines of Christianity*. For, although some philosophers, who have pretended great

* Romans, xii. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. 1st Cor. xii.

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zeal for the rights and the happiness of mankind, have manifested, at the same time, a strange antipathy to every kind of religion, and particularly to the Christian, it will be found, by every impartial inquirer, that the religion of Jesus Christ inculcates and sanctions every principle on which public and private happiness can be built. It is true that Christianity has frequently been most shamefully corrupted, and, in that corrupted form, produced the most dreadful calamities. But, to explode Christianity on this account, is just as sensible as to forbid mankind the use of water, air, or fire, because these elements have often been the vehicles of destruction. Whoever attempts to erect any system of policy to the exclusion of religion, betrays great ignorance of human nature, and great indifference for human happiness. Man is a religious creature, and is drawn to his Creator by all the principles of his constitution—by the sense of his imbecility, by conscience, by gratitude and admiration, and by his reason when duly improved. The grand requisite, then, is to procure for him a religion pure, simple, beneficent, and consolatory. This will be found only in the religion of Jesus Christ, as is exhibited in the sacred writings. Here the most perfect standard of duty is erected, in order to engage man to an endless progress in virtue; a sufficient remedy is provided for his deviations from it, when accompanied with penitence; the most glorious rewards are offered to his persevering endeavors; and the strongest succours are provided for his weakness. Such a religion powerfully strengthens every social and civil obligation, and prepares men for heaven, by rendering them useful on earth.

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